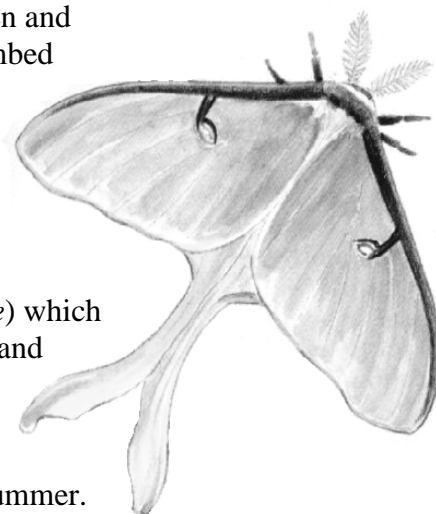


Luna Moth

The luna moth (*Actias luna*) is an unforgettable moth of pastel green and long sweeping tails. It had a wingspan of five inches and large combed antennae. Small eye spots are located on the fore wings and larger eye spots can be found in the center of the hind wings. Adults that emerge from within their cocoons in the spring have pink-purple wing margins and those that emerge in the summer have yellow wing margins.



Luna moths are members of the giant silk moth family (*Saturniidae*) which includes our largest moths such as imperial, cecropia, polyphemus and promethea moths. Silk moths do not eat as adults and spin their cocoons of silk.

Luna moths are found in deciduous hammocks in late spring and summer. Adults can be found in the early morning emerging from their cocoons or on the lower portions of trees shortly after emerging. Flying adults can often be seen around lights in the evenings. They are found from southern Canada throughout the eastern United States to Nebraska and Texas. In Florida they are restricted to central Florida northward.



Adult silk moths fly at night in search of mates and host plants on which to lay their eggs. The adults live long enough to mate and lay eggs, which is generally only three days, and then they perish. A female attracts mates to her by releasing a chemical pheromone that the males can detect from up to a mile away. Unlike butterflies the adult silk moth does not eat because it does not have mouth parts, but attains all of its nourishment from within its large soft body.

Luna moth larvae (caterpillar) prefer to feed on hickory trees, but can be found on other trees in our area such as willow, maple, sweet gum, persimmon, and beech. The caterpillar is very large and green with a thin lateral yellow stripe. Its surface is smooth except for small reddish orange knobs called tubercles and occasional small hairs. The head may be green or brown in color. Silk moth larva go through instars just as butterflies do. Following their last instar (their fifth) they spin a cocoon made of silk with leaves of the host plant attached at random. The cocoon is constructed among the leaves of the host plant which then drop to the ground in the fall. In Florida there may be as many as four broods.



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