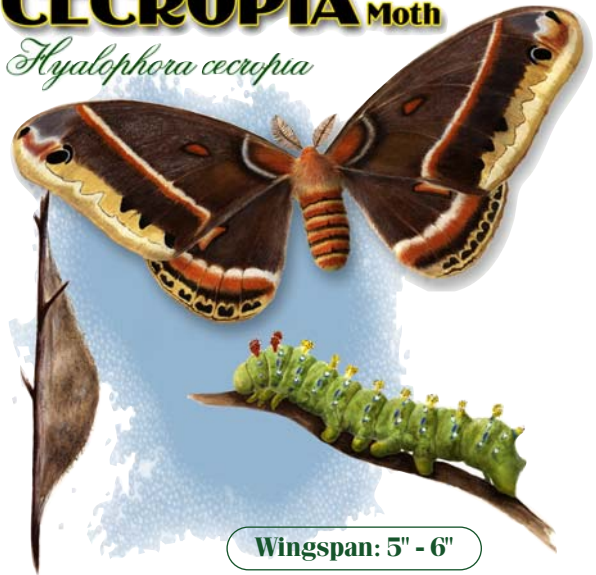


New York's largest moth, the cecropia can measure six inches from wingtip to wingtip and belongs to the group of moths known as giant silk moths. Like all giant silk moths, cecropia adults have no functioning mouthparts, so they don't eat. Instead, they survive on fatty reserves they accumulate during the caterpillar stage. Cecropia caterpillars eat a wide variety of trees and shrubs and become quite large, about the size of a man's thumb. When fully grown, the caterpillars spin tough, fibrous, silky cocoons where they spend the winter as pupae. Cocoons are usually located on twigs a few feet off the ground. Adults emerge in the spring. At this time, mature females release pheromones to attract males. Males have large, feathery, ultra-sensitive antennae that enable them to track the pheromones from as far away as two miles. After mating, females lay their eggs on a variety of tree species.

CECROPIA Moth

Hyalophora cecropia



Wingspan: 5" - 6"

GYPSY Moth

Lymantria dispar



Wingspan: 1" - 2"

The gypsy moth is a type of tussock moth native to Europe. Adult males are dark and good fliers; females are light with black markings and do not fly. Like all tussock moths, gypsy moth caterpillars have distinct hair tufts on their bodies. If handled, these body hairs can sometimes cause an irritating skin rash. The gypsy moth is a European native whose caterpillar often does a great deal of damage to forest trees in the Eastern United States. It was intentionally bred in the US by an amateur silviculturist trying to develop a strain of silk-producing caterpillars. Its accidental escape was not considered to be of any importance until it was too late. Gypsy moth caterpillars eat tree leaves and during an outbreak the caterpillars can quickly defoliate large tracts of forest. Outbreaks usually occur in cycles of 8-9 years. Unfortunately, attempts to eradicate this forest pest have contributed to the decline of hundreds of species of native moths and butterflies.

One of several species of tent caterpillars, the eastern tent caterpillar is the species known for spinning silken "tents" in cherry trees across the Eastern United States, including New York State. In the spring, tent caterpillar eggs hatch and the larvae group together to weave communal nests in tree branches. The tents are only used for shelter. At night, the caterpillars leave the tent to feed on newly forming leaves. Apple and cherry trees are preferred foods, but tent caterpillars will eat other related tree species as well. They can completely defoliate an entire tree in a few weeks. Tent caterpillars retreat inside the tent during the day to avoid being eaten by birds and other predators. During late May to early June, mature caterpillars permanently abandon the nests and begin to wander. This is partly to seek out fresh leaves, but also to find suitable protected sites to form cocoons and pupate. Adults emerge approximately three weeks later to mate and lay eggs. Eggs are deposited in masses around the twigs of their food trees. The adult moths are medium-sized, with a yellowish-brown, hairy body. They are active at night.

TENT Caterpillar

Malacosoma americana



Wingspan: 1" - 2"