

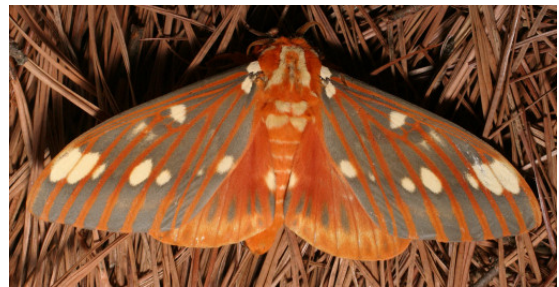
Earth's Beauties

Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. ~Rachel Carson

I was delighted to encounter one of earth's beauties in the shape of a caterpillar in my backyard this summer. My father happened upon the creature, who appeared to have thorns growing out of its back, on a Staghorn Sumac. Then brown, the caterpillar turned out to be a Hickory Horned Devil, the larva of a Regal Moth (*Citheronia regalis*). Since it was discovered I have enjoyed watching it over the past few weeks as it has devoured nearly a dozen branches of the Sumac and grown to six inches long.



The Hickory Horned Devil in my yard.



An adult Regal Moth.

The Regal Moth is found in deciduous forests of the eastern United States and is one of the largest in the US with a wing span of 9.5-15.5cm. The life of this magnificent creature begins as it hatches from a small egg looking like bird droppings. It feeds at night and molts its skin five times before finally transforming into a lovely emerald green Hickory Horned Devil. Instead of forming a cocoon the larva pupates in a chamber 5 to 6 inches underground where it overwinters. When mature it emerges and the females release pheromones to attract males who can fly for miles to reach a female. Adults have reduced mouthparts, so they never eat and live only a week. Watching this caterpillar has been one of the highlights of the summer and I hope to be able to see it when it emerges a Regal Moth.

If you want to observe some of earth's beautiful caterpillars consider adding host plant to your landscape. Some of these host plants include Yarrow, Marsh Milkweed, New England Aster, and Button Bush along with many others. Find the right native plants for your yard and enjoy the beautiful and mysterious caterpillars that nature has to offer.