

Wisconsin's Giant Silkworms

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One of the largest and showiest group of insects in the state are the giant silkworm moths (Family Saturniidae) Adults can have wingspans of up to 6 inches and brightly colored with blue, red, and white spots and bands. The caterpillars can be up to 5 inches long

Winter for most species is spent inside a cocoon. The imperial moth spends the winter as a pupae buried in the ground. The caterpillars must be exposed to cold weather before they fully develop into adult moths. Adults emerge from Late May through July. They do not feed as adults and usually find a mate within 24 hrs. of emerging . Birds and bats feed heavily on adults so they are often very short lived.

Cecropia is the most common species . Caterpillars have orange, yellow and blue spines on the body and get up to 5 inches long. They feed on apple, birch, elm, willow , poplar, and other trees
Cocoons are often spun on twigs or branches.



Polyphemus has a tan base color with blue eyspot. Caterpillars are about the size of an adult thumb and



Promethia is most often found feeding on wild cherry, but can feed on many broadleafed trees. They are smaller with wingspans around 3 ½ inches. Males are darker and females have bright reddish brown bands in the wing.



Luna is easily identified with the long tails and pale green wings. It is found more commonly in Northern Wisconsin. Caterpillars feed on willow, hickory, and cherry. Cocoons are concealed in ground leaf litter and are difficult to find.



Imperial Moth has become more widespread in recent years. Caterpillars burrow into the ground to spend the winter. They feed on oaks, elms, maples, basswood and walnut. Caterpillars can be green, brown or tan and have several yellow to orange spindles behind the head.

