

## Buck Moth

Lepidoptera: Saturniidae, *Hemileuca maia*

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Male Adult Buck Moth  
[Gerald J. Lenhard, LSU, Bugwood.org]



Buck Moth Caterpillar  
[Susan Ellis, Bugwood.org]

**Description** Caterpillars are approximate 2 inches (50 mm) long when full grown. The head, prolegs, and anal plate are reddish in color. The rest of the body is usually black with small white spots. Some caterpillars may have an almost white body instead of the typical black coloration. The adult buck moth measures about 2-3 inches (5-7.5 cm). It has black, semi-transparent wings with a white band and two prominent eyes on the forewings. The body is stout and hairy. The abdomen is grayish-white with either a reddish orange or black tip.

Buck moth caterpillars are covered with branched spines that are hollow and are connected to poison glands. Contact with these spines produces a burning, itching sensation along with redness and inflammation similar to a bee sting. Sensitive individuals may experience nausea within the first few hours after contact. The site of contact may remain painful and sore for several days.

**Common Host Plants** Caterpillars are usually found on oak trees, but may be found on willow, hazelnut, cherry, and rose as well.

**Damage** Buck moth caterpillars are a nuisance because of their stinging hairs. A person "stung" by a poisonous caterpillar should immediately wash the affected area to remove any insect hairs and poison that remain. An ice pack will help reduce swelling. People known to be sensitive to insect stings should consult a physician.

**Habitat/Distribution** The buck moth caterpillar is usually found in early summer, mainly in June. It is often confused with spiny elm caterpillars and gypsy moth caterpillars, which are also active at that

time. Young buck moth caterpillars may aggregate on the host plant or nearby vegetation, but older caterpillars tend to live singly.

**Life Cycle** The buck moth has a complete life cycle with egg, larval, pupal, and adult stages. There is one generation per year.

**Control** Stinging caterpillars rarely occur in sufficient numbers to be considered plant pests, but people who work with ornamental plants should learn to recognize them and avoid touching them.

**Interesting Facts** Adult buck moths have no functional mouthparts and do not feed.