

## Hickory Horned Devil

Lepidoptera: Saturniidae: *Citheronia regalis* (F.)

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Hickory Horned Devil  
 [Clifford Andrews, Bugwood.org]



Royal Walnut Moth  
 [Tom Coleman, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org]

**Description** Young hickory horned devil caterpillars may be orange or brown with a greenish tint, but mature caterpillars are a striking green with black and white markings down the sides of their bodies. Both the young and older caterpillars possess pairs of large black-tipped red horns near the head and black spines down their backs. Mature hickory horned devil caterpillars are quite large and can grow up to 5.5 inches (14 cm) long. Overall the caterpillar resembles a ferocious dragon, but it is not dangerous or harmful. The spines are not poisonous and not very sharp.

The attractive adult moths are known as regal or royal walnut moths. They are heavy-bodied moths with rusty orange and yellow-striped bodies. Their forewings are grayish with rusty-orange veins and large yellow spots. Typically the wingspan measures between 3.75 to 6 inches (9.5 to 15.5 cm) across.

**Damage** Both the caterpillar and the adult moth are completely harmless. The hickory horned devil is not considered to be a pest and does not require any control measures.

**Habitat/Distribution** These caterpillars commonly feed on various species of hickory and walnut.

**Life Cycle** This insect has a complete life cycle of egg, larval, pupal, and adult stages. In late summer, mature caterpillars burrow into the ground where they pupate over the winter. The following summer newly emerged adult moths climb out of the ground and crawl up nearby vegetation to expand their wings. Females emit pheromones to attract males, who may fly several miles in search of mates. Mated females lay eggs on host plants. Adult males and females do not have functioning mouthparts and do not feed. They die about a week after emergence. Typically there is one generation per year.

**Interesting Facts** This is the largest caterpillar found in North America but it does not turn into the largest moth in North America; that honor goes to the cecropia moth (*Hyalophora cecropia*).