

Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / June 2015

Ilia Underwing Moth ■ Flat-backed Millipede

Ilia Underwing Moth	
Class:	Insecta
Order:	Lepidoptera
Family:	Erebidae
Genus:	Catocala (Underwings)
Species:	ilia (Ilia Underwing)



This month we have a “two-fer” thanks to Master Gardeners Marge Loomis and Linda Esser.

⌘ While raking in her yard, Marge uncovered a caterpillar in the debris. Gray and bark-colored (its color occasionally mimics lichen), it revealed a pinkish/purple-colored underbelly. After researching, Marge determined it looked like the larva stage of the species *Catocala ilia*, a member of the Underwing Moths. Some common names for the moth include “The Wife” and “Beloved Underwing.” The scientific name, *Catocala*, actually means “Beautiful Below.”

The moths have a wingspan of 2.5-3+ inches. Their varied brightly colored hindwings (underwings) frequently are striped, with black bands alternating with orange or red bands. Like most moths, they are night-flying insects; therefore, the bright colors are not often seen except in insect collections.

The *Ilia Underwings*’ habitat is in woodlands and forests (their common food source is oak) ranging from southern Canada to Florida and Texas. There is one generation with mature caterpillars (3 inches) from April (in Florida) to early July. They are one of eastern North America’s most abundant underwings.

An interesting tidbit - - the Underwings may throw their fecal pellets several body lengths from their bodies. This is done by quickly flicking their rear end to one side as they release a dropping.

Pest control measures are not needed.

⌘ In the case of Linda’s “bug,” she discovered this Millipede in the mulch of her flower bed. I recently did a general article on Millipedes and Centipedes. In this case, we have one of the Flat-backed Millipedes.

After research, I believe this Millipede is in the family of *Xystodesmidae*. The yellow markings are a good identifying mark. Being in the family of *Xystodesmidae*, the greatest diversity is in the Appalachian region of eastern North America.

They usually have 20 body rings and have no eyes. The first pair of legs on the 7th ring are gonopods in males. Many are brightly colored or marked, and they all have stink glands.



This family of Millipedes is particularly abundant in deciduous broadleaf forests. It is best not to handle them (you will see why below) but there is no need to kill them.

Interesting facts about the Order, Polydesmida:

- Consists of 10 families in North America
- Range in size 3-130mm
- Members of some families are brightly colored with red, yellow, orange and black
- This is the largest Millipede Order
- They are the only Millipede Order that produces benzaldehyde and hydrogen cyanide as a defense)

The Family Xystodesmidae:

- Has 300+ subspecies worldwide
- Due to the complexity of the family, it is divided into smaller units or tribes, with 10 total tribes, 8 of which occur, at least partly, in the U.S. and Canada.

Flat-backed Millipede	
Class:	Diplopoda (Millipedes)
Order:	Polydesmida
	(Flat-backed Millipede)
Family:	Xystodesmidae
Genus:	Apheloria
Species:	virginiensis

Photo References / Resources

Ilia Underwing Moth:

mothphotographersgroup.msstate.edu/species.php?hodges=8801 (photo by Maury Heiman)

Ilia Underwing Caterpillar Underbelly:

www.agriculture.purdue.edu/agcomm/newscolumns/archives/OSL/2011/May/110512OSL.html#.VVqCXZNcBv8

Flat-backed Millipede:

Linda Esser, Master Gardener

Research References / Resources:

National Wildlife Federation's *Field Guide to Insects and Spiders of North America*, Arthur V. Evans, 2008

Princeton Field Guides *Caterpillars of Eastern North America*, David L. Wagner, 2005

www.agriculture.purdue.edu/agcomm/newscolumns/archives/OSL/1994/December/122294OSL.html

<http://bugguide.net/node/view/24507> ▪ <http://bugguide.net/node/view/97472/bgimage>

<http://bugguide.net/node/view/60547> ▪ <http://bugguide.net/node/view/5251>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xystodesmidae> ▪ <http://bugguide.net/node/view/245072>

Jim Revell is a Bedford Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.

Read more of his articles on the "Jims Bugs" page @ www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org