

River Bend Naturalists Notebook

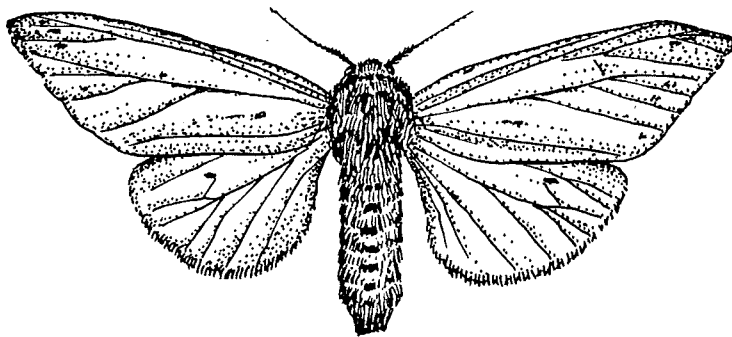
Presented by: RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault, MN 55021

WOOLLY BEAR CATERPILLAR

and the

ISABELLA TIGER MOTH

Isia Isabella



Folklore has it that the Woolly Bear Caterpillar is a weather prophet. The width of the rust-brown band around the middle is supposed to predict what kind of winter to expect. A broad band indicates a mild winter, a narrow band means a long, hard winter.

Actually the width of the band tells us more about the age of the caterpillar than about the coming of winter. The young Woolly Bear has more black than brown, which makes for a narrower band. As it grows the brown band widens. In response to the season the fall movement of the caterpillars in search of over-wintering areas, makes them easily seen.

If early winter conditions set in, more of the caterpillars with the narrow bands may be found indicating a hard winter, which is probably how the legend started.



The Woolly Bear over-winters as a larva curled up under bark, logs or in debris or grass. In the Spring the caterpillars will wander around looking for something to eat, and for a place to pupate. It will then spin a cocoon out of silk and hair from its own body, and enter into the third stage of its life cycle. In late May the Woolly Bear will emerge from the cocoon as adult Isabella Tiger moth.

The adult female will lay its eggs on a green plant that will provide food for the young Woolly Bear when they hatch during the Summer.

The Isabella Tiger moth is nocturnal, often seen beating against the porch light. Whether or not the Woolly Bear is a weather prophet, it will continue to remain folklore and interesting speculation.

— text by Orwin A. Rustad.