



“Giant” Insects!

We all remember the Japanese Sci-fi movie “Mothra” don’t we? The giant silkworm caterpillar that wreaked havoc on Tokyo, then turned into a humungous moth that did like damage! Well, the insects in Oregon are not quite that big, but we do have some that are considered giants in the insect world.

The prionis beetle (a type of longhorn beetle) is often brought into the office because people think it is going to eat their entire house or garden. It sometimes flies around their house lights at night and really means no harm. At 2” to 2 1/2” this brown beetle (impressive and scary to some) is merely trying to find a mate, and is attracted to the ultraviolet light from the porch fixture or backyard light. Actually, the larva of this large beetle feeds on dead wood of stumps and assists in the natural environmental recycling sequence. It really is a beneficial when you get right down to it!

Another insect that is brought in occasionally to the office is the giant water bug. This guy can be 3” to 3 1/2” long, and is brown-gray in color! Not only that, but it bites. It is a true bug with a proboscis and has a bite that is not unlike a bee sting. It hurts for a while and usually subsides after about 20 minutes. Giant water bugs live near water, hence their name. They, and their immatures, feed on aquatic life, including minnows and tadpoles. An interesting thing about their life history is that the females of some species lay their eggs on the back of the males and the males protect the eggs until they hatch. Sort of like a pregnant dad, I suspect!

Certain other aquatic insects can attain a large size. The dobsonfly has an aquatic larva that is called a “hellgramite”. This is a favorite bait of fresh water fishermen. The adult is an insect with a 3” to 3 1/2” grayish wingspan, but a small body. They often come to lights at night. The males have huge mandibles. They don’t bite, but they look scary!

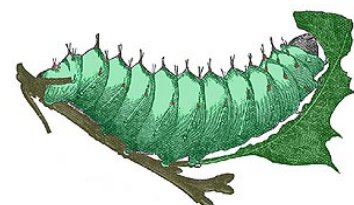
Dragonflies also have aquatic immature stages, but the adults are quite large and the record size is over two feet. Of course this was from prehistoric times!

In the MG office, we do get in a few of the “giant silk moths” as they are called. The polyphemus moth, 5” in wingspan, and tan in color with large “eye spots” on the hind wings is an endemic species that is common all over the U.S. and into Canada. A second moth of almost equal size is the ceanothus silk moth. This one is reddish in color and has some cream colored markings on the wings, with white spots shaped like commas in the center of each hind wing. I especially like these two moths, as I like to rear the caterpillars, which grow up to be about 3” in length and resemble fat, green sausages.

Some butterflies are large, but it really is only their wings that make them appear so. The west coast tiger swallowtail is large and showy, but not nearly as large as our other “giant” insects! These swallowtails are yellow with black “tiger” stripes on their wings. You may have seen them flitting among your garden flowers!

As you go about your daily business, look for these and other, “giant” insects in our Western Oregon environment. You will be amazed by the diversity in nature!

Next time you are in the MG office, check out some of these “giant” insects in our collection. Please don’t pull out the drawers too far, they do not have stops!



Larva of *polyphemus* (After Riley.)