

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

## Underwing Moths

POST #44—September 22, 2022

Moth biodiversity in the Sax-Zim Bog is impressive. If you check out the last couple of Annual Reports, we have been featuring the breakdown for species biodiversity in the Sax-Zim Bog and consistently moths have topped that list. This year, we crossed the 600 species documented mark! Today, let's take a look at one of the more exciting groups of moths found in the Sax-Zim Bog: Underwings!

Underwings are one of the most exciting groups of moths, for those who think moth watching is exciting! The genus *Catocala* is full of a wide array of colorful, yet cryptic moths and caterpillars. Both adult moths and their caterpillars adopt cryptic colors and patterns to help them blend in to their surroundings to avoid predation. However, if an adult moth gets spotted, they utilize a startle display where they flash their brightly colored hindwings at would-be predators. Caterpillars of most underwing moths have fringes or tassels along their bodies, which gives them incredible camouflage against twigs.

This group of moths is typically a late flying group, meaning that adults are flying from July-September. Underwings are typical of a late-season moth species as they do feed as adults. This is unique as many adults, especially large moths, do not feed as adults and lack mouth parts entirely! While these moths are attracted to "moth lights," they are readily attracted to "moth bait." Moth bait typically consists of a mixture of fermented bananas, dark beer, and brown sugar that can be spread on trees to attract moths. This strategy of attracting moths tends to work best early in the season (late-March to April) or late in the season (August to September).

In Minnesota, there are at least 45 species of underwing moth. Two of these species have elevated conservation statuses in Minnesota. One species, Abbreviated Underwing, is actually a prairie specialist utilizing leadplant! We have documented only five species in the Sax-Zim Bog. However, the species we have documented show off the diversity of color and pattern, as well as name, that you expect from underwings. Excitingly, the 900th species documented in the Sax-Zim Bog was an underwing moth!

More information included with the photos below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)



White Underwing is another beautiful moth! Uniquely, this species has black and white forewings and hindwings. Most other underwing species in our area have yellow, orange, or red and black hindwings.



Semi-relict Underwing is a variable moth, not typical of most underwings. It has a dark morph and a light morph, like the moth photographed above. This light morph actually helps explain its common name. This color form looks quite like White Underwing (*Catocala relict*) and since they are quite different species, but look similar, taxonomists came up with the name Semi-relict!



Briseis Underwing was the 900th species documented in the Sax-Zim Bog, one of a few moth species that hold the honor of being benchmark species in our quest to document the biodiversity of the region. Another oddly name species, Briseis Underwing gets its name from Briseis, who was an important figure in Homer's The Iliad!



Pink Underwing is a lovely moth. There are a couple moths with pink underwings in Minnesota, so ID is not always as easy as it seems! If you are further south of the Sax-Zim Bog, the pink underwing you see might just be Darling Underwing, which is not found in our area.



Once-married Underwing is an odd name for a moth, really, any non-human creature! Even odder, there is no story or particular meaning for the common name of this species. No matter the name, this underwing is fond of perching on the trunks of trees during the day and is often hesitant to flash it's red underwings at passersby.