

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Lichen Moths

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Winter can be trying time if you like arthropods. Sure, there are a few species that might be seen during warm patches during the coldest months, but for the most part you are kept waiting until warmer temperatures. While the group of moths featured on today's post might not be flying during the winter, the host for their caterpillars are quite obvious and abundant! Today, let's take a look at a fascinating group of moths: The Lichen Moths!

Lichen moths are a group of moths whose caterpillars use lichens as a primary food source or host! Lichens are perhaps not the first thing that comes to mind when you think of food, but humans and caribou have been using some species of lichen as food for a long time! In the Sax-Zim Bog, we have documented 5 species of lichen moth, with one or two additional species yet to be documented. With around 60 species of moth in North America that utilize lichens as a food source, there is a lot of diversity to be had. Below, are a few notes on the species we have documented so far!

Painted Lichen Moth is perhaps the most common of all of the lichen moths in our area. We routinely see this species in most habitat types when setting up moth lights for education programs or for fun. A beautiful moth, this species bright colors signal that it is not something predators want to eat! Although it looks a lot like a lightning bug, they do not seem to be mimic any particular species.

From the most common, to one of the more uncommon lichen moths in our area, Pearly-winged Lichen moth has only been encountered twice by Head Naturalist Clinton and Volunteer Naturalist Kristina during moth outings. This is an attractive species, with very bright and reflective scales on its wings. A fairly widespread species, Pearly-winged Lichen Moth can be found across the US and Canada.

Bicolored Moth is fairly specialized, compared to our first two moths profiled above. It prefers coniferous forests and lichens that grow on conifers! An interesting species, it looks very similar to two other moths found in our area: Virginia Ctenucha and Yellow-collared Scape Moth. While the aforementioned species tend to be day active, Bicolored Moth is nocturnal. The yellow edges to the wings help separate it from Virginia Ctenucha and Yellow-collared Scape Moth.

While it might not look very interesting, Pale Lichen Moth is definitely worth a second look! The wing scales on this species look almost like long hairs, giving it a fuzzy appearance. The wing venation is very subtle, as well, giving it almost a bark-like

appearance. This has an interesting foraging biology. Pale Lichen Moth caterpillars prefer to eat the algal component of lichens, as opposed to the fungal component!

Our last species is another beauty! Little White Lichen Moth is poorly named to be sure. While it might be a fairly small moth, it certainly is not only white. The upperwings are usually quite highly patterned with black maculations and two dark central spots to the forewing. Another fairly common species, it is a pleasure to see this moth anytime it is encountered.

More information about these moths included in the photos below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Painted Lichen Moth is a beauty! The red and yellow tones to the wing venation can be variable, with some appearing nearly all red, while others are nearly black.



Pearly-winged Lichen moth is aptly named. The shiny white scales on the wings of this species really make it glow.



Bicolored moth is not flashy and like the other lichen moths, looks a little beetle-like. The bright yellow edges to the wings are usually the easiest way to ID them from similar species.



Pale Lichen Moth is really a cool species! Though subtle, this is a really lovely moth.



As you can see, Little White Lichen Moth offers a lot more than its name suggests! Most individuals have some level of speckling on their wings. This is a fairly lightly-marked individual.