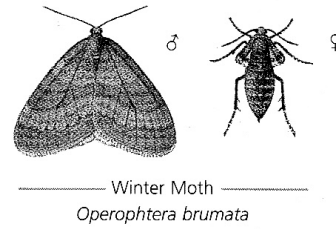


Winter Moths

Have you ever wondered what those little moths are which flutter weakly across the road in front of the car on winter evenings? Well, for once they are well named - they are Winter Moths



It may seem odd that moths choose to be on the wing in the winter. In fact they seem to be able to handle the cold weather, though they only fly on warmer nights. You may wonder what they feed on – the answer is that they don't feed, though they are thought to drink. Most moths are well provided with stored fuel by their ever-munching caterpillars which I have recently seen described as “digestive systems enclosed in skin”. The caterpillar's sole job is to eat enough food and lay down enough fat to fuel the process of changing from caterpillar to adult, and there is plenty left over to keep the adult going for a while.

The caterpillars of the Winter Moth are one of those very common (though not so common as they used to be) little green ones that feed mainly on oak trees, but also on a number of other trees and plants. These caterpillars are the favoured food of many small birds especially Blue Tits and Great Tits who feed their young on this ready supply of easily-caught food. The caterpillars feed voraciously in the spring when the trees first put on new leaves and they are capable of doing significant damage to the tree. When they are fully grown they drop to the soil where they burrow underground to pupate, and stay there until the winter when the adult moths emerge.

The male Winter Moth is a small brown drab thing and can often be seen at windows as it is strongly attracted to light. The female is a strange wingless creature – when she emerges from her cocoon she simply climbs up the nearest tree where she waits for a male to find her. After mating she lays her eggs near a suitable leaf bud. In the spring the eggs hatch, the tiny caterpillars emerge and find the nearest leaf, and so the cycle starts all over again.

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