

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By: Ursula Nanna

“Dusk and Dawn Moth”

So what is that darting through your flowers at dusk and dawn, hovering and flying at warp speeds? Is it a bee...nope, or a hummingbird...nope! What it is, is a Sphinx moth, more specifically, a white-lined moth or *Eumorpha fasciatus*. It belongs to the Lepidoptera family that also has butterflies as part of the family, too.

Common names for this moth are hawk moth, lined moth, and hummingbird moth. The most common seen is the white-lined moth which has a wing span of 2 – 4 inches, is capable of flight speeds up to 35 mph, and is able to hover, and dart sideways in a rapid flight pattern! It makes you dizzy just to think of it!

Sphinx moths lay greenish, smooth eggs that develop in 3 – 21 days on host plants. The developing caterpillars are medium in size with a single posterior horn at various lengths on the instar. They eat until they are ready to form the pupae. Depending on the time of year, the pupae is the overwintering stage and is found on or in the soil. This of course is a case formed to protect the moth until it hatches.

As an adult, these moths have fore and hind wing scales. The thorax, abdomen, are covered with these seed-like scales as well. The proboscis (nose) is very long and protracts much like a party noise-maker and lies close to the body when not in use sipping nectar. It is quite a sight to see if you are fortunate enough to catch sight of one. Their life span is an incredibly short 10 – 30 days.

The larval or host plants for the caterpillars include pentas, portulacas, and purseline. The favored nectar plants for the adult moths are pentas, hostas, columbine, coral honeysuckle vine, *Salvia greggii*, and *Salvia coccinea*.

When you see sphinx moths in your gardens at dusk or dawn, take a few minutes to enjoy their flight patterns and enthusiastic nectar sipping.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmqa@gmail.com