



Mike Shanley holds up one of the first moths caught at Moth Night at the Greenbelt Nature Center. Some 40 children and adults took a hike with Ed Johnson, director of science of the Staten Island Museum, to see moths in action at night. (STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/KATHRYN CARSE)



MOTH NIGHT SIGHTINGS

The insects the group spotted that evening:

MOTHS

- Banded tussock
- Carpet moth
- Horn spanworm
- Lesser maple spanworm
- Spring beauty
- Tulip tree beauty

OTHER INSECTS

- Caddis fly
- Camel cricket
- Daddy long legs

EGBERTVILLE

An evening with things that flutter, delight

A group of 40 attends Moth Night to learn about these nocturnal insects

By Kathryn Carse
carse@siadvance.com

A team of sleuths with flashlights snaked through a trail of the Greenbelt Nature Center in search of moths and other nocturnal creatures Saturday night.

There were a few shrieks — the camel crickets, large with long legs were the creepiest — but mostly unrestrained curiosity ruled.

"I saw a weird beetle. It looked like a roach," said Hunter Malloy, a 9-year-old from Grasmere who was with his sister, Shea, 7, and father, John.

"And I saw a daddy long legs [spider] with red parasites," he added to the list of cool stuff he saw.

The Grasmere family was participating along with about 40 other children and adults in Moth Night, the Staten Island Museum and Park Department's event to kick off National Moth Week, July 19 to 27.

Why are people more annoyed or afraid of moths than fascinated? Is it their appearance at night, the fluttering, the banging into the porch light?

"I think it is the movement that they don't understand. It seems erratic and not purposeful like a bird's," offered Claire Arthurs, manager of education with the Staten Island Museum. She was standing at the dazzling collection of mainly exotic (non-native) moths that illustrated their subtle beauty — more in patterns than vibrant color. The display was donated to the museum by Taylor Jones.

"They are very peaceful and great pollinators," she said, one of a few naturalists



With their flashlights, net, bug box and lots of curiosity, the Malloys of Grasmere — Shea, 7, dad, John, and Hunter, 9 — came well prepared for Moth Night. For more photos of Moth night, check our online report at silive.com/entertainment.

singing the praises of the flamboyant butterfly's seemingly shy cousin.

Ed Johnson, the Museum's director of science, added that there are many more species of moth than butterflies.

May be up to 800 species

"There are 100 species of butterflies on Staten Island. For moths, there are at least 500," he said. The latter number is from a survey in the 1920s by Leng and Davis.

"It could be up to 800," said Johnson.

Evidence of moths is sometimes found in the holes in woollens and some are found in cereal or flour abandoned in the back of the cabinet. But they are the minority, says Johnson, most moths are either neutral or beneficial as pollinators and food for other animals.

Then he remembered the moth he had seen most recently, the squash vine borer. He said it was really beautiful and destructive in the garden, true to its name.

Outside, Mike Shanley was fielding questions at the "moth wall," he had constructed with a UV or black

light and a sheet. Nearby was "sugaring," some old bananas, sugar and beer laid out to lure the moths.

A wood thrush joined by an Eastern towhee were serenading. Shanley said a yellow-bellied cuckoo could be heard earlier.

"They circle around (electric) light because they are disoriented. Moths navigate by the moon. With cloud cover, they are distracted by other lights," explained Shanley, president of Friends of Blue Heron Park.

Not to be lured into spotlight, a tulip tree beauty was spotted on the center's wall by an observant participant.

"Everyone's hoping for a luna moth," said Matthew Willis, a Brooklyn blogger of Backyard and Beyond. Large and an exquisite green, the luna moth would be a highlight if it was seen.

Kassidy, 5, and Kayla, 3, were getting a look at everything they could, shepherded by their mom Brooke Skelly-Yolland, a city Park Ranger from South Beach.

"They like fireflies and bugs in general. This is an opportunity to be out in nature and

see other living things," she said.

Johnson got everyone rounded up for the short hike on a loop trail. "Everything is different at night," he said.

Sure enough, once a slug and spider were spotted, your attention shifts from the novelty of the dark to the possibility of finding something yourself on a tree trunk or log.

Few spotted

Not many moths were spotted, but when they were, they flew in the cone of a light until they escaped back to the dark.

Near the end of the walk, I caught one in my light and observed how fast the wings whirred. It was flying low and as I tried to keep it in the light, Kayla scampered ahead.

"I touched it. It went right on my finger," she announced, sounding delighted.

Shanley said he sees hundreds of moths in Pennsylvania, but the numbers at the event and in his back yard don't come close. He strongly suspects that the spraying for West Nile disease is taking its toll on the local moth population.

"It's killing everything that flies at night," he said. Insects are an important part of the food chain, he noted. The Eastern screech owl, for example, loves dining on moths.

The evening wound down with the relaxed group taking seats in a semi-circle around a performance area in which the Deep Tanks Butoh Dancers performed "Moth Ball," an interpretation of the plight of the moth in the modern world. Basking in the light of a moon-like orb, the dancers moved in moth-like poses.

The introduction of artificial light — generated by a stationary bicyclist — pulls them away from the natural light and puts them in an exhaustive frenzy.