

the NATURALIST CORNER

Brought to you by Peggy Potts
Coastal Master Naturalist

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Venomous Caterpillars, Watch Out!



Puss Caterpillar

County employee was recently stung by one. People who have been stung report that the sting is ten times more painful than a bee sting!

These caterpillars are seen most often in fall when they come down from the trees to the lower branches to make their cocoons. Most of us view caterpillars as colorful and harmless as they slowly chomp away on leaves. They almost seem like a natural snack for many predators, but there are quite a few caterpillars that are venomous to predators and humans. This is the case with the Puss caterpillar. Puss caterpillars are the larval stage of the southern flannel moth. They are about the size of a quarter. One can see how the name was derived, as the caterpillar looks like a furry cat, but under all that soft looking hair are pointed spines that connect to glands beneath their skin. The glands are toxic and produce poison. They store the toxins from the leaves of plants they eat. Any predator or human who encounters this caterpillar might be stuck with the spines and injected with venom.

Other venomous caterpillars include the Pipevine Swallowtail, Io Moth, Hag Moth, Saddleback, Buck Moth,

and Spotted Oleander. Of course, not all caterpillars are venomous. Some are only venomous to animals, not humans. One example is the Monarch caterpillar. They are toxic to animals but not to humans. Also, some caterpillars are not poisonous but may have a sting. It is not easy to tell if a caterpillar is poisonous, however, most caterpillars with spines and hair are likely to be toxic. They also tend to be very colorful letting you know to stay away.

To be on the safe side its best to observe them from a distance and look forward to the time they emerge into more friendly moths and butterflies.

To hear the podcast of this article, go to greenbelt.charlestoncounty.org under "News & Events," "Naturalist Corner."



Saddleback Caterpillar



Stinging Rose Caterpillar



Spotted Oleander Caterpillar

As a graduate of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, I would like to share my excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, I will share my observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

I also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing me, Peggy Potts, at ppotts@charlestoncounty.org.

Charleston County Greenbelt Program

Once these caterpillars emerge into beautiful moths and butterflies, a great place to visit and observe them is at the Sullivan's Island Station 16 Nature Trail. You can enjoy this tranquil trail among the protected, accredited land on Sullivan's Island. The trail system was developed with funds from the Charleston County Greenbelt Program. The Greenbelt Program has provided funding for many properties in Charleston county. For a list and description of our protected properties, visit greenbelt.charlestoncounty.org. Don't forget to follow us on the Greenbelt Program Facebook page.