

Yellow Woollybear

The term “woollybear” is given to certain densely haired caterpillars that wander considerably between plants. Also, they are usually observed in late summer and early autumn, which is when they occur on hemp. Two species of woollybears may be found on the crop, the **yellow woollybear** (*Spilosoma virginica*) and the **saltmarsh caterpillar** (*Estigmene acrea*).

Caterpillars of yellow woollybear are densely hairy and pale colored - ranging from light brown, to yellow to nearly white. The adult moths are moderate size with a wing span of 3.8-5.0 cm. The forewings are white with black spotting. Female moths have white wings with a small dark spot in the center.

The yellow woollybear survives winter as a pupa within a cocoon, hidden amongst leaves and other plant debris on the soil surface. Adults emerge over an extended period in spring and, after mating, the female lays eggs on leaves of host plants. Eggs are laid in masses of 50 or more and the eggs hatch in about a week.



Yellow woollybear caterpillars.



Adult of the yellow woollybear, the Virginia tiger moth. Photograph courtesy of Ken Gray Collection Oregon State University.

Upon egg hatch the tiny, young caterpillars originally feed as a group, producing a small patch of skeletonizing injury to leaves. As they get older, the individual caterpillars disperse throughout the crop, feeding on leaves for another 3-4 weeks. yellow woollybear caterpillars will feed on the leaves of an extremely wide range of broadleaved plants, including many common weeds, and they continuously move through the crop, rarely feeding heavily in a single location. When full grown they move to the soil surface, find a protected site and spin a cocoon within which they transform to the pupal stage. Adults, known as "Virginia tiger moths", emerge in a week or two



Late season outbreak of yellow woollybear in soybean.

rather than concentrating it on individual plants. These habits should result in leaf injuries that are insignificant to crop yield.

Lepidoptera: Noctuidae

and repeat the cycle. Two or three generations will be completed annually, but the generations overlap and caterpillars may be seen from late spring well into autumn.

Damage to hemp by yellow woollybear is likely to be minimal. Peak feeding occurs late in the season and is limited to foliage. Furthermore the active habits of these insects, moving constantly from plant-to-plant, spreads feeding thinly throughout the crop