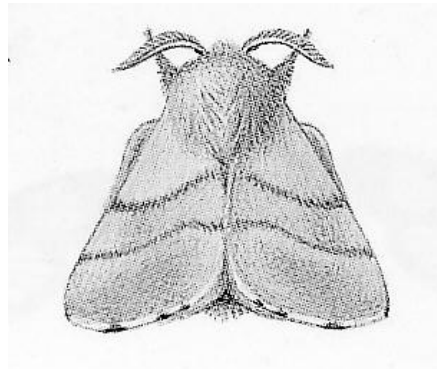


The Lackey Moth

Most you will have seen a Lackey Moth caterpillar in the last few weeks, probably without realising it. See <http://pembrokeshirewildlife.blogspot.com/> and scroll down to the entry for May 1st for a picture. They seem particularly abundant this year, their webs festooning twiggy shrubs especially near the coast. The adult moth lays eggs on the stems of suitable shrubs in the late summer (especially hawthorn and blackthorn but many other trees and bushes are also used), the caterpillars then hatch in April and feed in their shrub, protected by webs, until about June. They then pupate in a cocoon near the ground and the adult hatches out in July. The caterpillars are well protected from predators – they are hairy and can retreat into their web which is quite strong. These kinds of hairy caterpillars are the favourite food of cuckoos, but of course we don't have many cuckoos around here these days.



Some people are allergic to the hairs on these caterpillars, but these are not such a problem as the Brown-tail Moth caterpillars which sometimes reach plague proportions around London and the South Coast. The hairs of Brown-tail caterpillars drift on the wind and can cause serious skin reactions – they are therefore often sprayed with insecticide to kill them. Lackey Moth caterpillars are not such a problem, but still best not to handle them if you are sensitive to such things.

The adult Lackey Moth is medium sized, beige or sandy brown, with a furry body and large feathery antennae, with which the males pick up the scent of the females from several hundred yards. They often fly into a lit room and then zoom around in an uncontrolled fashion bashing into everything – we used to call them “whizzbangs” when we were children. Maybe you should consider keeping the windows closed at night during July and August as it looks like we will have a bumper crop of whizzbangs this year!