



Klamath Network Featured Creature

December 2009

White-line Sphinx Moth (*Hyles lineata*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

Sphinx moths are among the most arresting of our western lepidopterans. These majestic, hummingbird-sized moths often have bold and elegant markings on the wings and body. The White-lined Sphinx, like other members of the Sphingidae has a stout, yet streamlined body and elongated outer wings. The upper side of the forewing is dark olive brown with paler brown along the costa (front wing edge) and outer margin, a narrow tan band runs from the wing tip to the base, and white streaks along the veins. The upper side of the hindwing is black with a coral band across its center. The upper side of the thorax is covered with downy hair and bold white striping. The tongue is exceptionally long, over two times the body length!

Larvae (caterpillars) are large, smooth-skinned, hairless, and green with a large spur on the eighth abdominal segment. The family name stems from the alarm posture of the larvae, which rears its forequarters back and tucks its head downward like the Egyptian Sphinx upon threat.

Behavior:

Adults usually fly at dusk, during the night, and at dawn, but they will also fly during the day. Because of their large, plump bodies and relatively small wing surfaces, they must beat their wings very fast in order to stay aloft. Although they are constructed very differently from hummingbirds, White-lined Sphinx moths are able to hover hummingbird-like in mid-air as they sip flower nectar due to their similarly rapidly beating wings. This is an example of convergent evolution in foraging and flight behavior.

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

The White-lined Sphinx occurs throughout the region, though it is most abundant in and around the Cascades and Siskiyou Mountains, and likely a common resident of Whiskeytown, Oregon Caves, Crater Lake, and Lassen Volcanic.



Reproduction and Development:

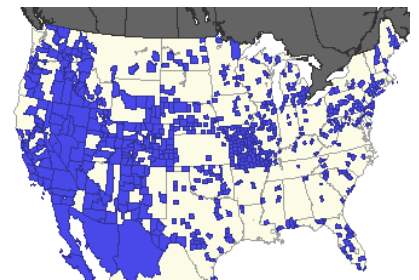
Eggs are laid on the surfaces of leaves, which provide food for the larvae upon hatching. Caterpillars pupate in shallow burrows in the ground. Massive population buildups occur, especially in desert areas, and can impact crops.

Habitat:

White-line Sphinx moths are very widespread and occur in open forests and woodlands, chaparral, and desert areas, and in mixed use rural areas at low to moderate elevations. They gather nectar from a wide variety of native and non-native plants, including willow herb (*Epilobium*), four o'clock (*Mirabilis*), evening primrose (*Oenothera*), grape (*Vitis*), tomato (*Lycopersicon*), purslane (*Portulaca*), and *Fuschia*.

Distribution:

The White-lined Sphinx has been documented throughout much of North America. In most regions, it is the most commonly occurring member of the Sphingidae.



More Information:

Powell, J. A., and C. L. Hogue. 1979. *California Insects*. University of California Press.

<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/species?l=3477>

<http://www.all-creatures.org/aw/moth-wlsphinx.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyles_lineata