

CATOCALA ILIA (NOCTUIDAE) FEEDING ON DECAYING FRUIT IN AN INNER-CITY ENVIRONMENT

The feeding of adult Lepidoptera on over-ripe fruit has been noticed for at least two centuries, but some recent observations may be of value and interest because they incorporate data about diurnal activity of a nocturnal moth as well as occurrence in an inner-city environment.

Occasional accounts have appeared of daytime flight of *Catocala*, yet adult feeding of this genus has generally been regarded as crepuscular and nocturnal. Moreover, little is known about the occurrence of *Catocala* in cities of some size, although it appears that the moths may be found in large numbers in such situations; for example, I have described Bryant Mather's collecting of 124 specimens (15 species) within two days in downtown Jackson, Mississippi (Wilkinson 1971, Michigan Entomol. 4: 59-60). In seven years of residence on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., I have found *Catocala* in abundance, but not as numerous in specimens or species as in Mather's situation. Although I have taken so rare a species as *C. marmorata* Edw. (daylight, at rest on a wall of the Library of Congress near an entrance lamp, 27 July 1977), the most common species of inner-city Washington is *C. ilia* (Cramer).

Seated in my enclosed back garden on 22 August 1976, while the sun was shining, I noticed a large *Catocala* fly into the grape arbor at 1400. Upon searching, I found a male *C. ilia* feeding at a cluster of over-ripe and broken Concord grapes. When leaving the extensive arbor I flushed another *Catocala* which was not captured but was quite probably *C. ilia*.

In 1977, several ornamental Oriental peach trees in my back garden threw down their first extensive crop of many hundreds of small peaches. I was unable to attend to gathering all of these immediately, and a number began to decay. At the same time I noticed an abnormal frequency of *C. ilia* on my windows and about my security floodlight at night. Walking into the garden with a flashlight at 0200 on 2 July I disturbed numerous *C. ilia* (many of which were taken, identified and released) feeding on the decaying peaches. With these hints in mind, on 4 July I kept a long watch in my garden, having purposely left peaches on the ground. At approximately four hours before dusk I noticed the first *ilia* flying in the garden. From that time until dark, *C. ilia* were sighted in flight at 20 to 40 minute intervals. I was able to trace perhaps 50% of these individuals, always to or near rotting peaches. Diurnal and nocturnal feeding continued into early August, until fallen peaches were no longer edible.

These observations not only suggest further opportunities for study of diurnal flight and feeding of *Catocala*, but indicate the desirability of more extensive research into the occurrence of the genus in urban areas. My data on *Catocala* in Washington, D.C. continue to accumulate.

RONALD S. WILKINSON, *The American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York 10024.*
