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ORDWAY BULLETIN
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

A FORECASTER at ORDWAY.

This morning I encountered a balled-up little creature in the pathway and took a closer look at him in order to gain an insight into the weather for the coming winter. This little Woolly-Bear (more correctly "Banded Woolly-Bear") is the caterpillar form of the Isabella Tiger Moth (Isia isabella) and some people - a lot of people - say that the width of its terminal bands portends the severity of the weather for the oncoming winter.

This little fat reddish-brown caterpillar with the bristly hairs forming black bands fore-and-aft seems to spend the languorous days of early October in wandering hither and thither with no apparent purpose. Actually it is seeking a place to curl up tightly and lie dormant through the winter under a pile of leaves or where drifted snow will cover it protectively.

Awakening in spring it will immediately go to work feeding on the plantains as they come to life. Soon it will form its cocoon, frequently on a fence, an old board or similar location and after about two weeks the cocoon form will hatch into an Isabella moth, a rather non-spectacular creature of about 2-inch wingspread, light beige in color with a few spots on its wings and a spotted abdomen.

The eggs laid by the Isabella hatch in early summer and become full-grown caterpillars by autumn, when they become the weather-forecasters which rumor has named them. I sometimes see one of them in the late winter, long before the snow has departed and perhaps they are brought out by short warming spells at that time of the year. Last year (when these lines were written) the black bands were narrow, indicating extreme cold and blizzards; we had it cold but it was "dry" and not so blizzardy.

The Museum of Natural History conducted a study at Bear Mountain, N.Y. and found that the bands were not uniform in width and therefore cannot be used as predictors of the weather. Well, I am still going to be looking at Woolly-Bears every autumn. It's not any more confusing than listening to the weather forecasts.... besides, Woolly-Bears are cuddly little fellows who don't bother anyone.

R J CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist

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