by Connie Blakley

While working in the garden a few months back, Calvin found an unusual (to us) caterpillar and we were both clueless as to its identity. The challenge in finding a new species, at least to me, is the identification and sometimes I spend hours scouring books and web sites in search of an elusive species.

This caterpillar was covered in long silky hairs a grayish brown color which made it appear to be soft and furry. There was just a hint of reddish brown down the center of the back. I immediately assumed it was a moth because I had always heard moth caterpillars are usually furry. I searched every caterpillar and moth book we have but most field guides contain very few caterpillar photos. I then started searching the internet and found a wonderful site (http://www.duke.edu/~jspippen/naturephotos/caterpillars.htm) with lots of moth caterpillar photos and that is where I found a similar critter of a reddish brown color and decided I must at least be in the right family. I then went back to my books and sure enough finally narrowed it down to a Southern Flannel Moth.

The moth isn’t nearly as interesting as the caterpillar; it has a wing spread of about 1 to 1-1/2 inches and a fat hairy body. Coloring is mostly white with a bit of yellow and brown on the forewing. The small family of flannel moths comprises only 11 species in North America. The larvae usually overwinter in their cocoons and that’s exactly what ours is doing. Can’t wait for spring to get a glimpse of the moth before we set it free.
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