

Caterpillars



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What are Caterpillars?

This week we are going to learn about caterpillars. Does anyone know what a caterpillar is?

Caterpillars are the larvae, or young of butterflies and moths. The word caterpillar actually means hairy cat!

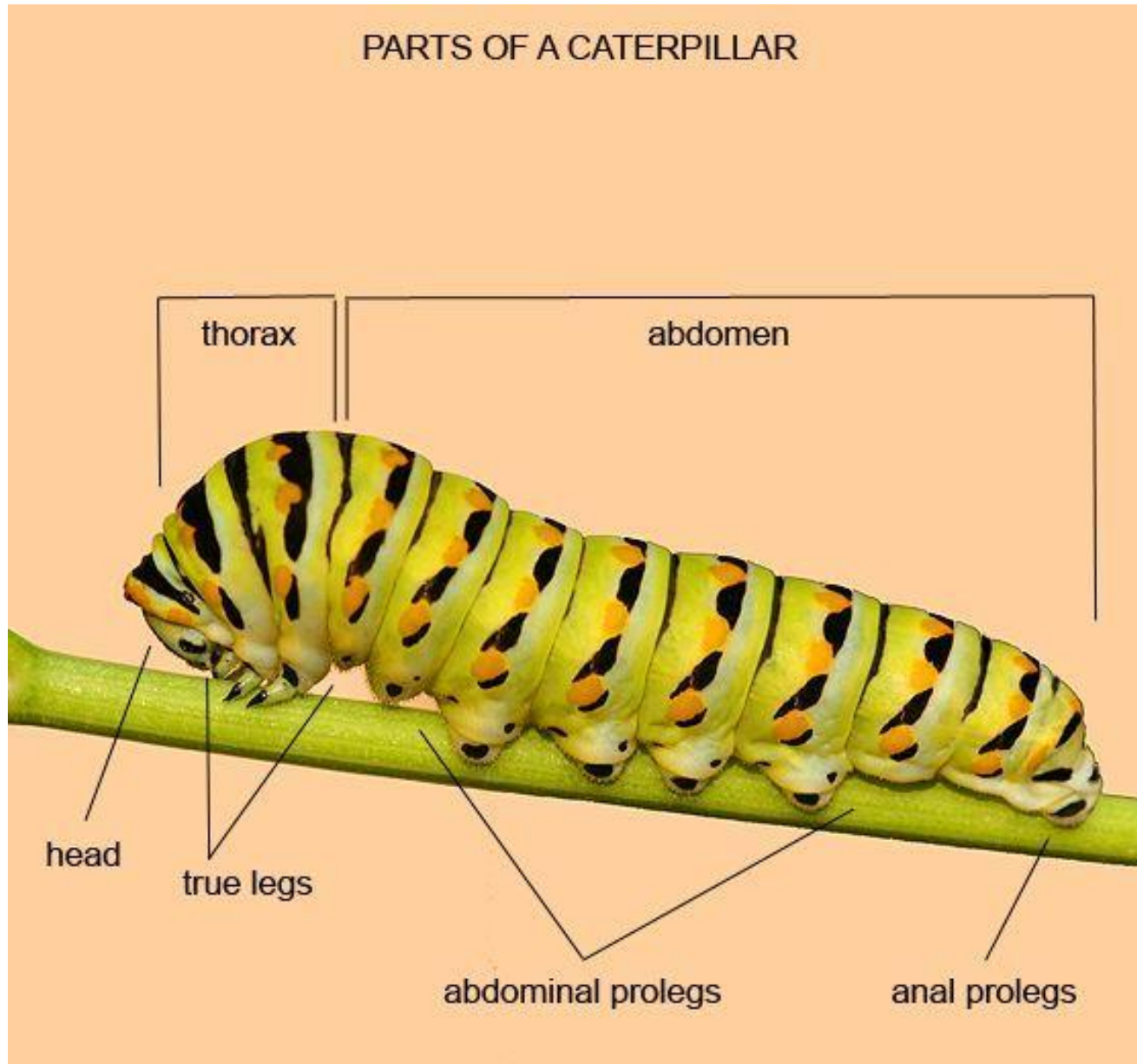
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Although it is easy to recognize the hairy kind, some caterpillars with bare skin are often mistaken for worms.

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Legs

The head of a caterpillar is followed by 12 or 13 segments. Like all insects, caterpillars have 3 pairs of permanent legs. Sometimes these legs have claws. The caterpillars will keep these legs, even when they are butterflies. The caterpillar also has two to five sets of soft legs that support its long body. These will disappear when it changes into a moth or a butterfly.

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Other Body Parts

Caterpillars have six beadlike eyes on each side of the head, just above the strong jaw. Caterpillars breathe through small openings on each side of its body. It also has short antennae.

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Caterpillars can be really tiny, like less than an inch. They can also be a few inches long.

The hawk moth caterpillar may grow up to four inches long.

The clothes moth caterpillar, one of the smallest, is almost never bigger than a quarter of an inch!

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Defenses

Caterpillars main predator, or the animals that eat caterpillars are birds and insects.

To avoid being eaten, caterpillars have some really cool protections.

Some caterpillars blend into their surroundings. Others have showy dots or stripes on their bodies that make them look fierce or very large. A few caterpillars give off yucky smells, and a few even have poisonous hairs.

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Molting

A caterpillar hatches from the egg laid by a female butterfly or moth. It grows quickly and soon becomes too large for its skin. The skin splits and the caterpillar wiggles out. This process, called molting, occurs four or five times before a caterpillar turns into a butterfly or moth. Some caterpillars eat up their old skins.