

# A RARE FIND IN THE AMAZON **THE ILLUSIONIST MOTH**

WE DISCOVER AND PHOTOGRAPH  
AN **EXTRAORDINARY**  
**NOTODONTID SPECIES**  
DURING A NIGHT WALK  
IN EASTERN ECUADOR'S  
LOWLAND RAINFOREST



■ A profile portrait of the stunning Notodontid moth - encountered in proximity of the rio Tiputini, in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest - shows to advantage its concave-looking folded wings. The resulting optical illusion is extraordinarily realistic and quite mystifying.



Another profile shot of the moth, later identified as *Crinodes bellatrix* thanks to Dr. Alexander Schintlmeister. The optical illusion of the wings being concave has to be seen in the field to be believed - the effect is absolutely dazzling to the viewer.

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As our headlamps' cones of light shine on a concave-looking, strangely shell-like object resting on a large leaf, we immediately realize we have stumbled upon a truly mysterious creature of the Ecuadorian Amazon's rainforest. What sort of strange creature is this - if it is alive at all? Antonella - together with our friends Lucas Bustamante-Enriquez and Alejandro Arteaga - keeps it brightly illuminated in the pitch black night as I observe it carefully through my 105mm macro lens. It appears to be

a large, finger-long moth of some sort, resting with its wings folded against its sides. But how can it be concave? Its wings look like the inside of a conch - light appears to enter a cavity, and then gradually disappear inside! The Escher-like optical effect is absolutely dizzying, and after a while we need to literally (and very delicately) touch the creature to convince ourselves its wings are truly flat after all, and not leading to some other mysterious fourth dimension. Identifying this unique, heavy-bodied moth appears to be

a daunting task - it takes the help of world-famous entomologists such as Dr. Piotr Naskrecki, Dr. Kenji Nishida, Dr. Ulf Eitschberger and Dr. Wolfgang A. Nässig to put us on the right trail, but final identification is due to the competence and kindness of Dr. Alexander Schintlmeister, who finally identifies our elusive Notodontid "illusionist moth" as *Crinodes bellatrix* (Stoll, 1780). So its identity is confirmed - but the dazzling optical illusion it offers still remains mystifying to whoever encounters it. ●



■ A dorsal view of *Crinodes bellatrix* (left) reveals the optical illusion offered by the ornamentation of its wings - which of course in reality are perfectly flat, as they should be! A frontal portrait of this curious Notodontid moth (above) shows its anterodorsal knob-like rostrum and a somewhat intimidating appearance.

■ A three-quarter frontal view of *Crinodes bellatrix* accentuates the truly perplexing optical illusion offered by its extraordinarily patterned wings. It is literally impossible not being completely fooled by the illusion of concavity offered by the moth - an optical trick which furthermore works to perfection from several angles.

