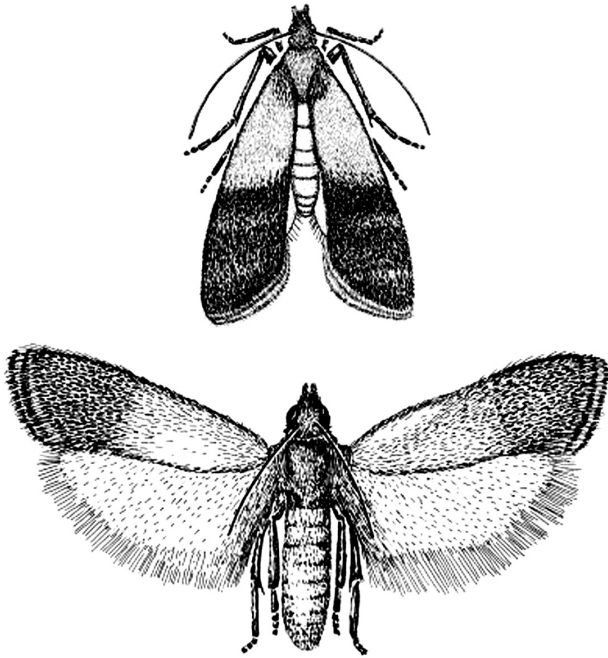




Indian Meal Moth



The Indian Meal Moth, *Plodia interpunctata*, is one of the most common stored product pests, rivaled only by the carpet beetle in frequency. The caterpillars of this moth feed on a wide range of dried foods, including dried fruits, cereals, flour, pasta, rice, chocolate, candies, shelled nuts, dried pet food (kibbles), and crackers, to name just a few. Infestations are common in dried cereal purchased in bulk or even in packaged products purchased from stores.

Adults are small dingy moths. Their front wings are characteristically bicolored: whitish gray nearest the body and the rest reddish brown with a slight coppery tint. This gives them the appearance of having a dark band across the wings. The hind wings are grayish, and usually covered by the fore wings when at

rest. Adults are about 1/3 inch long, and they hold their wings slightly away from the body, giving them a somewhat triangular appearance.

Like all moths, these insects undergo complete metamorphosis, including the stages of egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa, and adult. Eggs are laid on or near the food. A female moth may deposit from 40 to 350 eggs. After hatching, the small caterpillars feed for about two weeks before becoming full-grown. The caterpillars spin webbing as they feed. Eventually, they crawl up to the surface of the food material or even up walls, in order to pupate. The adult emerges in about 30 days. The entire cycle requires about six weeks and there are from 4-6 generations per year.

An infestation of Indian Meal Moth is usually first detected by observing webbed clumps of debris in food or other stored material, or when the mature caterpillars are seen crawling away from the source of infestation, looking for a place to pupate. Occasionally, adult moths can be observed flying in the vicinity of the infestation, particularly in the kitchen or other areas where dried food is stored.

The best control for Meal Moths is to clean up all dried food debris in cupboards and storage areas, and keep all dried foods in tightly sealed glass, plastic or metal containers. If food is suspected to be infested it can be placed in the freezer, or heated to 125°-130°F to kill the caterpillars and eggs. Aside from most Americans revulsion to eating insects, Indian Meal Moth caterpillars are harmless to eat, and do nothing more than increase the protein content of the food.