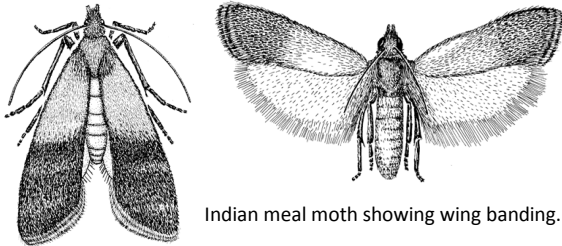


Indian Meal Moth



Indian meal moth showing wing banding.

The Indian Meal Moth, *Plodia interpunctata*, is one of the commonest stored product pests, rivaled only by the carpet beetle in frequency indoors. This moth is found worldwide associated with human activities. Meal moth caterpillars feed on a wide range of dried foods, including dried fruits, cereals, flour, pasta, rice, chocolate, cookies, candies, shelled nuts, dried pet food (kibbles), and crackers, to name just a few. As they feed the caterpillars spin webbing. Their presence is often noticed by observing webbed clumps of debris in food or other stored material. 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 bi-colored: the basal third is whitish gray and the rest reddish brown with a slight coppery tint. The hind wings are grayish. This gives them the appearance of having a dark band across the wings. At rest these moths are about 1/3 inch long, and they hold their wings slightly away from the body, appearing somewhat triangular.

Infestations are usually first noticed when mature caterpillars are seen crawling away from where they've been feeding looking for a place to pupate. Two weeks later adult moths can be observed flying in the vicinity of the infestation, particularly in the kitchen or other areas where dried food is stored. With sufficient food, warm temperatures and humidity the life cycle from egg to adult takes about 6-8 weeks depending on the temperature, and there can be up to six generations per year.

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.

Although most Americans find eating insects repulsive there is rarely any health or nutritional reason to avoid eating insects. Indian meal moth caterpillars are harmless to eat, and do nothing more than increase the protein content of the food.



Indian meal moth; photo courtesy of Kaldari, Wikipedia.org.