

INVASIVE SPECIES & EXOTIC PESTS

False Codling Moth *Thaumatotibia leucotreta*

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Increased global trade facilitates the movement of invasive pests like the false codling moth. Native to sub-Saharan Africa, false codling moth can be transported to the U.S. via cargo and passenger luggage—the transport of fresh produce being the most significant risk. In 2008, a single male moth was trapped in Ventura County, California, which marked the first domestic detection of this pest, though it is not established there.

Concern

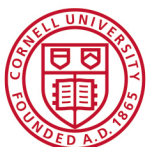
The tiny caterpillars feed on over 100 different plants and important crops including the avocado, citrus, corn, cotton, peaches, and plums. False codling moth could easily become established in the southern and southwestern United States where the habitat is most appropriate. If this moth were to become established, it could cause direct environmental damage via increased pesticide use and adverse feeding impacts on native and crop plants. In New York, crops of commercial importance, such as corn, tomato, bean, peach, plum, cherry and grape, could be at risk if the insect can migrate northward as the growing season progresses.

Description

The false codling moth is small, brownish-gray, and generally nocturnal. Body length ranges from 0.25 to 0.35 inches long, with a wingspan of 0.65 inches. These moths have a characteristic question-mark-shaped, brown marking on the end of each forewing. Eggs are extremely small, oval and translucent. Young caterpillars are whitish and spotted, while mature caterpillars are pinkish.



Preserved adult female (A) and male (B) moth specimens, note the question-mark-shaped marking on end of each forewing. Photo: Pest and Diseases Image Library, Bugwood.org



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Damage

When eggs laid on the surface of the fruit hatch, the caterpillars bore into the fruit, rendering it undesirable for consumption and leaving the fruit vulnerable to plant diseases and rots. Fruit may also ripen and drop from trees prematurely. The resulting fruit loss and damage could potentially result in billions of dollars in economic losses.

For More Information

False Codling Moth Pest Profile. Hoffman, K. 2008. California Dept of Food and Agriculture. http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/pdep/target_pest_disease_profiles/FCM_PestProfile.html

False Codling Moth FAQs. USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. <http://www.hungrypests.com/faqs/false-codling-moth.php>



Moth at rest on a leaf. Photo: Marja van der Straten, NVWA Plant Protection Service, Bugwood.org



Mature caterpillar showing pinkish coloration and dots. Photo: Marja van der Straten, NVWA Plant Protection Service, Bugwood.org