



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Share this information.
- Look for these caterpillars on cactus plants:



If you suspect that the cactus moth is present in your area immediately contact:

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Additional information can be found at:

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/animlas/cactusmoth.shtml>

<http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/products/gallery/cacca1.html>

Photos courtesy of H. Zimmermann, H. Klein, I. Baez, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, USDA and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute.



Sources:

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Solis, M.A., S.D. Hight and D.R. Gordon. 2004. Tracking the cactus moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum* Berg., as it flies and eats its way westward in the U.S. *News of the Lepidopterists' Society* 46 (1) pp. 3-7

Stilling, P. 2002. Potential non-target effects of biological control agent, prickly pear moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum* (Berg) (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae), North America, and possible management actions. *Biological Invasions* 4: 273-281

INVASIVE INSECT ALERT



CACTUS MOTH

Texas faces a serious threat to its wildlife if the cactus moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum*, is allowed to invade the Lone Star State. This cactus-eating moth is expected to severely impact wildlife forage and habitat. The cactus moth was accidentally introduced into Florida in 1989 and has migrated along the Gulf Coast, establishing infestations as far west as Alabama. The caterpillars of this moth can destroy entire cactus plants and could possibly have a catastrophic effect on the cactus-rich environment of Texas. The damage to the beautiful landscape could be extensive and perhaps irreversible.



THE MOTH

The cactus moth is astonishingly destructive. Currently, it is decimating cactus (genus *Opuntia*) as it migrates across the Gulf Coast states.



The moth lays its eggs on cactus spines. When the eggs hatch (within 3-5 weeks), the caterpillars burrow into the cactus pad and feed inside the pad for 1 to 2 months, often killing the plant.



Historically, the cactus moth has been intentionally introduced in some countries to destroy non-native cactus plants. Within 10 years after its introduction in Australia the cactus moth had destroyed 90% of prickly pear cactus covering 60 million acres.

Controlling and eradicating this insect BEFORE it invades Texas will protect wildlife.



The moth itself resembles many other moths but the **caterpillars are a unique and distinctive orange color with black bands.**

CONTROL

Currently, the best hope for control of this cactus moth lies with the use of the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT). This method was successful in eradicating the screwworm from North America and the world-wide control of the Mediterranean fruit fly.

The SIT consists of releasing irradiated sterile insects that mate with wild insects producing sterile offspring. Success depends on releasing large numbers of sterile moths to compete with wild moths for mating.

In the spring of 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture began releasing sterilized moths in a SIT validation study in Alabama. Unfortunately, funding is very limited since cactus is not considered an important agriculture product. A comprehensive control program would cost between \$1.5 and \$2 million per year. This level of funding would require Congressional allocation of funds.



WHY IS CACTUS IMPORTANT?

Cactus grows in harsh environments where many grasses and other plants cannot grow. It maintains soil stability, collects moisture and provides important habitat and food for various animals and birds. Loss of cactus due to the cactus moth may seriously impact wildlife populations in Texas.

Prickly pear serves as a "food bank" by providing its nutritional fruits during winter months and both the fruit and the juicy pads during times of drought. These foods can be critically important for White-tailed Deer, Rio Grande Turkey, Texas Tortoise, javelin and many small animals. It is also a valuable emergency food for cattle during drought.



Cactus provides shelter and nesting sites for small rodents and many bird species, including Northern Bobwhite Quail and Curve-billed Thrashers.