

Pest Fact sheet No 14

Indian meal moth

Name Indian meal moth

Latin name *Plodia interpunctella*

Size Adult 10mm- 12mm long

Larvae 0.5 mm – 15 mm long

Identification features

Adult moth



Small moths with a distinctive pattern of scales on the wings.
Brownish head with prominent mouthparts.
A cream band across the folded wings with grey and chestnut brown bands at the rear.

Indian meal moths and webbing clothes moths on a sticky trap



Note that the webbing clothes moths are much smaller with a ginger head and without any banding on the wings.

Larva



Larvae are creamy-white with an orange-brown head capsule. They produce silk webbing and pellets of excreta (frass).

Materials damaged

The larvae do not eat wool, fur or feathers and will not damage textiles. They will live on a wide range of dried food including flour, cereals, nuts and dried fruit. They will also eat chocolate and are a particular problem in dried pet food.

Life cycle

Adult moths fly well when it is warm and the females will lay up to 100 small translucent eggs in food or on packaging. The eggs hatch into tiny larvae which feed and grow quite rapidly. The larvae produce strands of silk webbing as they get larger and this may stick to the food. Larval excreta is produced as small gritty pellets called frass. When the larvae are fully grown they are up to 15mm long. They may bore through paper and card packaging to reach the outside and will then often migrate upwards in search of a place to pupate. When they reach a crack or crevice they will spin a silk cocoon. After one or two weeks the adult will emerge from the cocoon, fly around and mate to start the cycle over again. In warm rooms the cycle may be completed in 3-4 months which means that there can be 3-4 generations of moths in a year.

Finding the source and solving the problem

Successful control of Indian meal moth relies on identifying the food source they are living in and disposing of the infested food. If moth larvae have migrated from the food, the pupal cases need to be removed with a stiff brush and vacuum. Spraying insecticide is rarely effective and usually not desirable in areas where food is handled or stored. The best way to [prevent problems is by regularly checking for moth infestation and stock rotation. Sealed plastic containers protect dried food from egg-laying insects and will also contain any infestation and stop it spreading. Buying dry pet or bird food in bulk can result in food being stored for long periods of time, which allows any larvae to develop into adult moths which then lay more eggs.

Similar species

The only moth of a similar size which may be confused with Indian meal moth is the brown house moth *Hofmannophila pseudospretella* which is a copper colour with black spots and no banding.