

Nantucket Pine Tip Moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Tortricidae)¹

Wayne N. Dixon²

The Featured Creatures collection provides in-depth profiles of insects, nematodes, arachnids and other organisms relevant to Florida. These profiles are intended for the use of interested laypersons with some knowledge of biology as well as academic audiences.

Introduction

The Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock), is a serious pest of young pine in plantations, wild pine seedlings in open areas, Christmas tree plantings, ornamental pines, and pine seed orchards in the United States. Growth loss and stem deformity, caused by larvae feeding inside growing shoots, buds, and conelets, can be considerable during the first five years when most damage occurs (Yates et al. 1981). The increasing population of a preferred host species, loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda* L.), in Florida poses an ever-increasing problem of Nantucket pine tip moth infestations.

Distribution

The second most widely distributed native North American member of the genus, *Rhyacionia frustrana* occurs from Massachusetts south to Florida, and west to Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and California. It is also found in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico (Oaxaca), Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Powell and Miller 1978). The infestation of California was traced to shipment

of infested seedlings from Georgia in 1967 (Yates et al. 1981).



Figure 1. Adult Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: Christopher Asaro, University of Georgia, www.Forestryimages.org

Description

Adult

The adult female is larger than the male. Heads, bodies, and appendages covered with gray scales; mottled rusty-red forewing markings, dark basal patch bordered by a lighter crossband that is narrower than the basal patch; male forewing 4.0 to 7.0 mm ($\sim\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in) long, female forewing 4.0 to 7.5 mm ($\sim\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in) (Powell and Miller 1978).

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2. Wayne N. Dixon, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, Gainesville, FL.



Figure 2. Damage caused by the Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: Clyde S. Gorsuch, Clemson University, www.Forestryimages.org



Figure 3. Adult Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: James A. Richmond, USDA Forest Service, www.Forestryimages.org

Egg

The egg is slightly convex and 0.8 mm (0.03 in) in diameter; opaque white at oviposition, turning yellow to medium green at maturation.

Larva

Young larva cream-colored with black head; older larva light brown to orange; extra seta on abdominal segments 1 to 8 are posterodorsal, posterior, or posteroventral to the

spiracle, spatulate spinneret; approximately 9 mm ($\frac{1}{3}$ in) long when mature (MacKay 1959; Yates et al. 1981).



Figure 4. Larva of the Nantucket pine tip moth, (Comstock), feeding at the base of a needle.

Credits: David J. Moorhead, University of Georgia, www.Forestryimages.org

Pupa

The pupae are light to dark brown; area below tip of frontal horn extending between eyes convex and generally smooth; vertex of pupa not exceeding tip of frontal horn; approximately 4.6 to 7.5-mm ($\sim\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in) long (Yates 1969). Yates (1969) and Powell and Miller (1978) provide characters to separate adults and pupae of *Rhyacionia frustrana*, *Rhyacionia rigidana* (Fernald) (pitch pine tip moth), and *Rhyacionia subtropica* (Miller) (subtropical pine tip moth), three species with overlapping host and geographic ranges.



Figure 5. Pupal case of the Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: David J. Moorhead, University of Georgia, www.Forestryimages.org



Figure 6. Pupae of the Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock), inside a pine shoot.

Credits: Ronald F. Billings, Texas Forest Service, www.Forestryimages.org

Biology

Rhyacionia frustrana overwinters as pupae inside damaged shoots, cones, or buds. Moths emerge in the early spring, sometimes as early as February in Florida, when warm days become common. The moths mate and females oviposit eggs on new pine shoots and conelets or last year's shoots. In cool weather (late winter or early spring), eggs may take 30 days to hatch, but require only five to 10 days to hatch in hot weather (late summer). After hatching from eggs, young larvae may feed on the outside of new growth for a short period of time. Later, larvae bore into shoot tips, conelets, and buds. Larval feeding within these tissues continues for three to four weeks. Pupation occurs in damaged tissues. There may be up to four to five generations per year in Florida depending on temperatures, with cool weather prolonging the time required for the life cycle, and warm weather quickening it (Yates et al. 1981).

Hosts

Nearly 20 species of pine have been recorded as host trees for *Rhyacionia frustrana*: Caribbean (*Pinus caribaea* Morelet), Cuban (*Pinus cubensis* Griseb.), jack (*Pinus banksiana* Lamb.), loblolly (*Pinus taeda* L.), lodgepole (*Pinus contorta* Dougl.), Monterey (*Pinus radiata* D. Don), oocarp (*Pinus oocarpa* Schiede), pitch (*Pinus rigida* Mill.), pond (*Pinus serotina* Michx.), ponderosa (*Pinus ponderosa* Laws.), red (*Pinus resinosa* Ait.), sand (*Pinus clausa* (Chapm.) Vasey), Scotch (*Pinus sylvestris* L.), shortleaf (*Pinus echinata* Mill.), slash (*Pinus elliotii* Englem. ver. *elliotii*), sonderegger (*X sondereggeri* H.H. Chapm.), spruce (*Pinus glabra* Walt.),

Table Mountain (*Pinus pungens* Lamb.), and Virginia (*Pinus virginiana* Mill.) (Hedlin et al. 1981). Pine species with multinodal growth in a single season are especially favorable hosts (Yates et al. 1981).

Survey and Detection

Foliage discoloration occurs as needles turn from green to reddish-brown and subsequently fall off the shoot; dead or dying branch tips, often curved or tipped; resin beads or flakes and fine silk webbing on branch tips; and damaged parts hollowed out. Larvae or pupae may be present (Yates et al. 1981; Hedlin et al. 1981).



Figure 7. A comparison of healthy and infested pine shoots. Damage is caused by an infestation of the Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: Robert L. Anderson, USDA Forest Service, www.Forestryimages.org



Figure 8. Pheromone trap used to survey the Nantucket pine tip moth, *Rhyacionia frustrana* (Comstock).

Credits: David J. Moorhead, University of Georgia, www.Forestryimages.org

Management

Preventive: Plant pine species appropriate to site to minimize stress and encourage thrifty growth; promote early crown closure within a plantation; allow weed growth in a plantation to promote populations of natural enemies; plant non-preferred species of pines.

Remedial: Hand-prune infested shoots and conelets if level of infestation is minor and branches are within reach; apply a registered insecticide. Employ pheromone traps, specific to *Rhyacionia frustrana*, to optimize timing of insecticide application (Gargiullo et al. 1983).

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