Bird Dropping Moth

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Photo credits: *Canadian Biodiversity Information Facility (CBIF)*

Scientific Name *Cerma cora* H?bner, 1818

Family Name Noctuidae Owlet Moths

Did you know?
The bird dropping moth has likely been extripated from the Horseheads and Ithaca areas in New York, but the species is still present in the Albany Pine Bush.

Summary

Protection Not listed in New York State, not listed federally.

This level of state protection means: The species is not listed or protected by New York State.

Rarity G3G4, S1

A global rarity rank of G3G4 means: Vulnerable globally, or Apparently Secure -- At moderate risk of extinction, with relatively few populations or locations in the world, few individuals, and/or restricted range; or uncommon but not rare globally; may be rare in some parts of its range; possibly some cause for long-term concern due to declines or other factors. More information is needed to assign a single conservation status.
A state rarity rank of S1 means: Typically 5 or fewer occurrences, very few remaining individuals, acres, or miles of stream, or some factor of its biology makes it especially vulnerable in New York State.

Conservation Status in New York

Beyond the loss of habitat, the reasons this moth seems to be so rare are largely unknown. There is only one known occurrence in New York, although based on the availability of potential habitat and foodplants there should be at least a few more occurrences in New York.

Short-term Trends

The species has been stable or slightly declining at the Albany Pine Bush, but is still fairly common there.

Long-term Trends

This moth probably does not still occur in the Horseheads or Ithaca, New York areas and it has declined substantially in New England. However, no reliable information exists on long-term trends, except at the Albany Pine Bush where the population appears stable although most of the original habitat is gone.

Conservation and Management

Threats

Besides habitat destruction from development, the threats could include either too much or too little fire and it is not clear how well suited the current fire management practices at the Albany Pine Bush is for this species. It is possible that this species is found mostly in places that have not burned recently where the foodplants have become fairly large, but it is not likely that this moth would do well in a closed canopy forest. This species may thrive on the sprouts of the foodplant after fires. Gypsy Moth (Lymantria dispar) spraying with chemical biocides is a severe threat. Gypsy Moth spraying could also be a threat with Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis - a bacterial biological control used on Gypsy Moth caterpillars), but this isn't certain. Deer could be a significant threat if they browse on the sprouts of the foodplant after fires.

Conservation Strategies and Management Practices

The precise needs of this moth are not well known and monitoring needs to be initiated at the single known location in New York. The species pupates in dead wood, where it is vulnerable to fire during most of the year, although the habitat needs occasional fires in order to persist.

Research Needs

The effects of prescribed burning on this species need to be evaluated since it is one of the few pine barrens specialists that is, or recently was, still doing well in the Albany Pine Bush. Research issues include examining the suitability of pupation sites after fires, whether the species will quickly recolonize foodplant sprouts after fires and, if not, how long does it take for the habitat to become suitable again.

Habitat

In New York, this species inhabits pine barrens in the Albany Pine Bush. Habitats in New England also tend to be sandy and are sometimes pine barrens. The habitat for the historical Ithaca collections is unknown. While it is uncertain, the Horseheads, New York site was probably acid, shaly, ridgetop woods. In almost all parts of the range, this moth is much more localized and habitat-restricted than the local foodplant, which is usually Fire Cherry (Prunus pensylvanica) in New York and New England.

Associated Ecological Communities

Pitch Pine-oak Forest
A mixed forest that typically occurs on well-drained, sandy soils of glacial outwash plains or moraines; it also occurs on thin, rocky soils of ridgetops. The dominant trees are pitch pine mixed with one or more of the following oaks: scarlet oak, white oak, red oak, or black oak.

Pitch Pine-scrub Oak Barrens
A shrub-savanna community that occurs on well-drained, sandy soils that have developed on sand dunes, glacial till, and outwash plains.

Sandstone Pavement Barrens
An open canopy woodland that occurs on very shallow soils over sandstone bedrock; this community is best developed where the bedrock is nearly level, thus forming a pavement. The best developed examples are found on Potsdam Sandstone in Clinton County. Large examples often include wetlands, such as perched bogs and inland poor fens.

Identification Comments

This species is extremely distinctive in the adult stage. See illustrations such as Rockburne and LaFontaine (1976) and Rings et al. (1992). The larva is mottled, rather purplish, with sparse long hair.

Identifying Characteristics

This is a very easily recognized species. However, with no published illustrations, larvae or photographs of larvae, should be identified by experts familiar with it, such as Tim McCabe (New York State Museum), David Wagner (University of Connecticut), or Dale Schweitzer (The Nature Conservancy / NatureServe).

Characteristics Most Useful for Identification

This moth is unmistakable. See any published illustration of it, such as Rockburne and Lafontaine (1976), Rings et al. (1992) and most of those on the internet. The larvae is equally distinctive, but no published illustrations are known.

Behavior

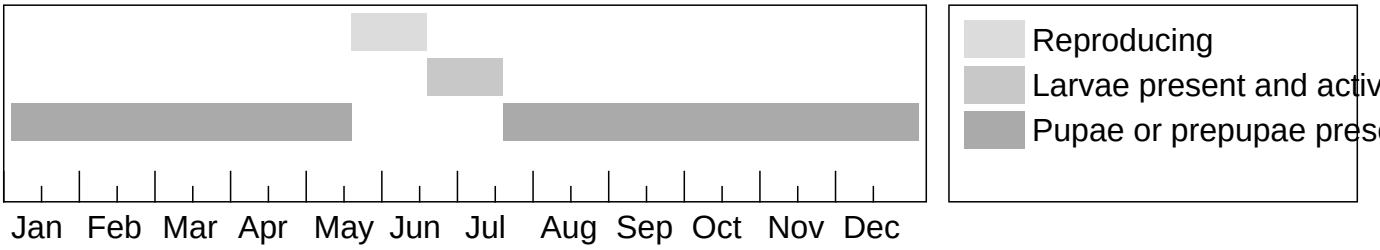
The adults are nocturnal and are collected at lights.

Diet

The larvae feed on young leaves of Fire Cherry (also known as Pin Cherry - Prunus pensylvanica), in New York. While they do not accept the common wild Black Cherry (Prunus serotina), it is possible that other species of native cherries, plums, or hawthorns (Crataegus spp.) are also used.

The Best Time to See

The flight season could vary from year to year, but generally early June is the adult peak and most larvae probably finish by early July in the Albany Pine Bush.



The time of year you would expect to find Bird Dropping Moth in New York.

Conservation Comments

This is a small genus and there are are only two species in New York. It is rarely misidentified.

Taxonomy

Kingdom Animalia
└─ **Phylum** Mandibulates (Mandibulata)
└─ **Class** Insects (Insecta)
└─ **Order** Butterflies, Skippers, and Moths (Lepidoptera)
└─ **Family** Noctuidae (Owlet Moths)

Additional Resources

Links

NatureServe Explorer
http://natureserve.org/explorer/servlet/NatureServe?searchName=CERMA+CORA

Google Images
http://images.google.com/images?q=CERMA+CORA

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