

Fact sheet

Sunflower moth

What are Sunflower moths?

The Sunflower moth (*Homoeosoma electellum*) is a significant pest of oilseeds such as canola and sunflower in North, Central and South America. They have also been recorded on other members of the daisy family (Asteraceae), sweetclover, corn, cotton and citrus. This species lays its eggs in flowers where the larvae feed on pollen then the developing seeds. The feeding of larvae can also leave sunflower heads susceptible to infection from fungal pathogens such as *Rhizopus* spp.

What do they look like?

The adult Sunflower moth is a small (8-12 mm long), pale tan to cream coloured moth usually with speckled forewings. The wings are held tight over their abdomen giving it a cigar shaped appearance. The hairless larvae are 19-25 mm in length. Larvae are pale yellow when newly hatched but develop a brown head and alternating reddish-brown and cream coloured stripes. Pupae are 10 mm in length and are reddish-yellow to brown in colour. Sunflower heads infested with Sunflower moth larvae are generally covered in frass and webbing.

What can they be confused with?

The Sunflower moth can be confused with a number of moth species both at the juvenile caterpillar stage and the adult moth stage including *Helicoverpa* spp. However *Helicoverpa* spp. lack longitudinal stripes and have more obvious hair. Any insect activity including webbing and frass on sunflower heads should be investigated further.

What should I look for?

Look for the small, pale, cigar-shaped adult moths, which rest on the underside of leaves during the day and fly upwards if the leaf is disturbed. Adults can be identified by a pale hind margin, a long fringe of hair on the hind wing when the wings are spread and



Adult Sunflower moth.

Mark Dreiling, Retired, Bugwood.org



Sunflower moth larvae.

Frank Peairs, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



Sunflower head soft rot caused by *Rhizopus* spp.

Howard F. Schwartz, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



Adult Sunflower moth. Note pale hind margin and fringe of hair on the hind wing and disk shaped spots on fore wing.

Natalie Wright, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bugwood.org



Sunflower moth larvae damage to sunflower seed.

Frank Peairs, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



Sunflower moths on sunflower head.

Phil Stoebeck, Kansas State University, Bugwood.org

dark disc shaped spots on the forewings with a pale leading edge. Also look for reddish-brown and cream striped caterpillars on sunflower heads or any signs of caterpillar activity on sunflower heads such as webbing, frass and *Rhizopus* spp. infection.

If you see any unusual insects in your crop please contact the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

How do they spread?

Adults are migratory in their natural habitat and capable of flying long distances. It is also possible for adults to be carried on machinery and vehicles. The caterpillars can be transported through infested seed.

Where are they now?

The Sunflower moth is a migratory moth native to the Americas.

How can I protect my farm from Sunflower moths?

You can protect your farm from Sunflower moths by checking your farms frequently for the presence of new pests and diseases and by closely investigating any insect activity on sunflower heads such as webbing and frass and *Rhizopus* spp. infection.

If you see anything unusual, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881



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