



Bogong Moths



Each spring Bogong moths migrate from lowland breeding grounds to the high country in southeast Australia where they spend the summer.

Background

Each year as the weather warms in south east Australia, Bogong moths (*Agrotis infusa*) prepare to migrate. Through spring they fly to the high country of the Snowy Mountains in southern New South Wales and the Victorian Alps. They have been doing this for thousands of years to escape the harsh summer environment in their winter breeding areas of the Darling Downs in Queensland, western slopes and plains in New South Wales and drier inland regions of Victoria.

In autumn they make the return journey. Bogong moth fly at night and, attracted to lights, can cause problems for floodlit buildings by blocking air-conditioning ducts and setting off alarms. During the day they hide in dark crevices. Bogong moths are brown with a wing span of about four centimetres. Their wing pattern provides camouflage when they are resting.

There are numerous reports of large groups of Bogong moths causing inconvenience to humans. In 1865, Bogong moths invaded a church in Sydney, causing a service to be abandoned. In Canberra in the mid-1970s, Bogong moths invaded new, brightly lit building in huge numbers, causing lifts to fail. In 1988, vast numbers of moths caused havoc at the newly completed permanent Parliament House and engineers had to reduce lighting and redesign air intakes. Winds have been known to carry Bogong moth out to sea, even as far as New Zealand.

Description

While Bogong moth occurs throughout non-tropical Australia, they only appear to migrate in the southeast. Clustered like roof tiles, they sleep through the summer (aestivate) in caves and crevices at about 1 200 metres. Bogong moths are brown with a wing span of about four centimetres. They belong to the family Noctuidae. The wing pattern easily distinguishes the Bogong moth from other closely related species. Their brown coloring provides camouflage while they are resting in the caves.

Life history

Adult Bogongs feed on nectar and, during migration, are often seen feeding at dusk on flowers such as grevilleas. They prepare for summer by building fat reserves (up to 60 per cent of their bodyweight). During aestivation they usually do not feed but they may drink in dry weather. Adults emerging in spring are sexually immature. The food they eat when they return from the mountains allows them to reproduce. If nectar is not available they are unable to reproduce. In a favorable year a female lays up to 2 000 eggs and the larvae grow slowly over winter. Known as cutworms, because they cut plants off at ground level, they can be minor pests for crops. In late winter the larvae pupate in the ground. Plague numbers only occur when there is favorable weather and abundant food. Plagues are difficult to predict as the factors favoring reproduction also favor fungi and predators that attack the Bogongs.

CSIRO Entomology is not currently researching Bogong moths.



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Treatment

Very limited treatment is possible as these are usually in plague proportion. Some sprays or dusts may only help reduce numbers if they were to come into contact with these applications. This may help with a roof situation if alarms are being set off regularly, particularly in Commercial situation. It is not known how long it will last but 3-4 weeks is not uncommon. Some methods you can use is to vacuum them up or apply normal fly spray to knockdown.