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## BAMBOO MOTH IN AUCKLAND

An Asian moth, *Artona martini* (Zygaenidae), whose caterpillars feed on various species of bamboo was first found in Whangarei in 1996. There are no native zygaenids in New Zealand so this introduction represented the first record of this family here. There are about 400 species in this family worldwide. Most of them are tropical but they are reasonably well represented in temperate regions. There are about 30 species in Australia.

*Artona martini* is the most common bamboo leaf feeding zygaenid species in China and Japan. The caterpillars can occur in very high numbers although they can be quite rare between outbreaks. This would seem to be the case in New Zealand. Very high numbers were recorded in Whangarei in 1999 but since then the insect seems to have had a low profile. However, in Auckland this summer very high numbers have been found and damage to some species of bamboo has been quite noticeable. This was brought to the attention of Scion's Forest Protection Diagnostic Laboratory by surveyors carrying out high risk surveillance work in Auckland.

The laboratory has also received three phone inquiries from members of the public in Auckland. Two of these inquiries were about very large numbers of caterpillars "going walkabout" and in one instance entering a house.

Caterpillars were recorded climbing the walls of a house in Whangarei in 1998. Interestingly, all three inquirers thought they had found caterpillars of the gumleaf skeletoniser (*Uraba lugens*). The caterpillars are superficially similar to *A. martini*.



*Artona martini* caterpillar

The caterpillars have urticating hairs that can cause a skin rash accompanied by a burning sensation so handling the caterpillars should be avoided.

The caterpillars can pupate on the host leaves (this was observed in Whangarei in the late 1990s) but recent observations in Auckland have revealed that pupation usually takes place in crevices and holes including inside dead bamboo stems. Caterpillars that are "going walkabout" are undoubtedly looking for suitable pupation sites.

*Artona martini* is still known only from Northland and Auckland and has been recorded from the following species of bamboo:

- *Bambusa multiplex* (hedge bamboo),
- *Miscanthus sinensis* (Chinese fairy grass),
- *Phyllostachys bambusoides* (giant timber bamboo),
- *P. nigra* (black bamboo),
- *Pleioblastus viridistriatus* (dwarf green stripe bamboo), and
- *Shibataea kumasaca* (ruscus-leaved bamboo).

*Continued over...*



Above: Pupae inside dead bamboo stem

At left: Severe defoliation of bamboo

*Bamboo Moth continued...*

It has not been recorded from *Bambusa oldhamii* (Oldham's bamboo) in the field although *Artona martini* has been successfully reared on it in the laboratory. This bamboo is quite commonly used as horticultural shelter.

In the late 1990s cast caterpillar skins and dead pupae of *Artona martini* were intercepted on second hand vehicles imported from Japan at Auckland, Tauranga and Nelson. This points to the likely mode of entry into New Zealand.

John Bain & Chris Inglis (SPS Biosecurity)

Further reading: Gill, G.S.C., 2000. A first record of *Artona* (Balataea) *martini* (Lepidoptera: Zygaenidae) for New Zealand. New Zealand Entomologist 23: 33-35.

[www.ento.org.nz/nzentomologist/free.../Volume%2023-33-35.pdf](http://www.ento.org.nz/nzentomologist/free.../Volume%2023-33-35.pdf)

**LARGER MOTHS OF NEW ZEALAND**

In late March this year there was a very welcome addition (for entomologists anyway) to the Landcare Research website. Landcare has made on a start on an image gallery and online guide to New Zealand's larger moths.

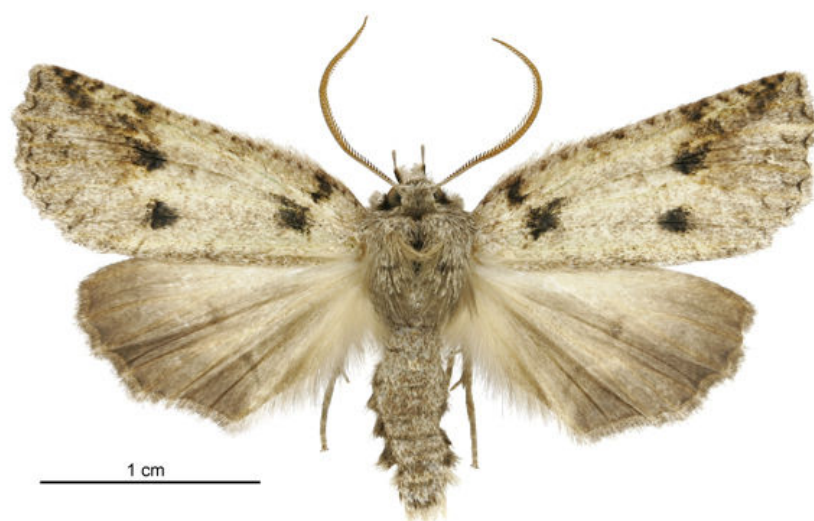
The first version of the guide covers the subfamily Ennominae of the looper family Geometridae. This group includes some common and familiar forest species such as *Pseudocoremia suavis* (common forest looper) and *Declana floccosa* (forest semilooper). Both of these species feed on a wide range of native and exotic trees and shrubs and are common in exotic forests.

*Pseudocoremia suavis* populations have reached outbreak proportions on several occasions, e.g. on *Pinus radiata* in Canterbury in the 1950s and on *Pseudotsuga menziesii* in Kaingaroa Forest the 1970s. There has only been on recorded outbreak of *Declana floccosa* in exotic forests – on *Larix decidua* at Naseby, Central Otago in 1958.

The photos of the moths on the Landcare website are of very high quality and are certainly worth a visit. I look forward to other groups of moths being added to the site.

Go to: [www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biosystematics/invertebrates/largemoths/](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biosystematics/invertebrates/largemoths/)

John Bain

**GUMLEAF SKELETONISER BIOLOGICAL CONTROL**

A biological control agent for *Uraba lugens* (gumleaf skeletoniser), *Cotesia urabae* was released by Scion in the Auckland Domain in January 2011 (see FH News 212, January 2011).

Since the first release, another two releases of this parasitoid wasp have been made at the same site by University of Auckland graduate student Gonzalo Avila-Olesen.

Several cocoons of the wasp were found in the field one month after the first release. A close eye will be kept on the release site for cocoons in spring-summer. Finding them would indicate the wasp has survived winter.

Michelle Watson



Above: *Cotesia* cocoon on skeletonised leaf.

Below: *Declana floccosa* (photo courtesy of Landcare Research)

**NEW RECORDS**

We are no longer publishing details of new records. For further information on results of MAF funded programmes see MAF's Biosecurity magazine (<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/publications/biosecurity-magazine/index.htm>) where information on new biosecurity identifications is regularly published.

John Bain