



Cactus Moth Detection and Monitoring Network on Public and Private Lands in the United States. A partnership between USDA -APHIS, USGS, and Mississippi State University
Progress Report September 2007

Webpage: http://www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus_moth

Introduction. Cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*), one of the most successful biological control agents in history, has been transported around the world in various prickly pear cactus control programs. By 2002, free-living populations of the moth had spread from the Florida Keys to the Florida Panhandle and South Carolina. It now poses a serious threat to native prickly pear cactus populations in the American Southwest, as well as the cactus industry and desert ecosystems in Mexico.

A research, extension, and coordination effort to monitor the spread and develop integrated control of cactus moth has been developed as part of collaborative research between USGS and Mississippi State University, with assistance from USDA -APHIS. This project has the following components: Early Detection and Reporting of Cactus Moth, Distribution of Prickly Pear Cactus, in the Region, Modeling of *Opuntia* Distribution, Cactus and Cactus Moth Extension Information, Web-Based Database of Cactus and Cactus Moth Locations, and Regional Coordination

I. Early Detection and Reporting of Cactus Moth. Task Description: Cactus moth detection techniques will be tested to find an optimal approach for detection, and a network of detection sites at known cactus locations will be implemented. The MSU insect collection will develop instructional information for potential volunteer monitors at the selected monitoring sites, and provide for moth species verification and vouchering.

Summary of Objectives:

1. Develop and test techniques for (a) detecting cactus moth infestations, (b) delimiting infested areas, and (c) determining effectiveness of control actions.
2. Develop a cactus moth detection network in the project area.
3. Develop protocols for monitoring native and ornamental cactus populations.
4. Develop protocols for reporting and verifying suspected cactus moth infestations.

Progress this month:

- Pheromone traps from Arizona (28, nurseries), Mississippi (12, Grand Bay Savannah NWR), and Texas (6, Padre Is. N.S., Galveston) were screened. All were negative.
- Visual observations were made of *Opuntia* species at four sites in Alabama (Marion and Lawrence Cos.) and four sites in Mississippi (Noxubee and Lauderdale Cos.) and data entered into monitoring network.

II. Distribution of Opuntia in the Region.

Task Description: MSU staff, natural resource agency professionals, and volunteers will be used to search for populations of *Opuntia* cactus in the region. Native cactus populations will be located using herbarium records, contact of federal, state, and NGO biologists, and surveys. The location and description of all *Opuntia* cactus populations in the region and of cactus moth monitoring sites will be placed on a web-accessible database, as part of extension efforts listed below.

Summary of Objectives:

1. Develop and test methods to locate and map populations of cactus in support of surveys to detect and delimit cactus moth infestations in the region
2. Utilize professionals and volunteers to survey cactus locations in the Southeastern region.

Progress this month:

- USGS BRD is currently working with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System to set up a number of new Cactus Moth Sentinel Sites on barrier islands along the Carolina Coast. Cactus Moth is a serious threat to Midden Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia stricta*), which is considered threatened along the Carolina Coast.
- In order to determine the northern leading edge of the Cactus Moth infestation in the U.S., the Carolinas Cactus Moth Detection and Reporting Network is planning to survey all established Cactus Moth Sentinel Sites that have been established in the Carolinas. To date, cactus moth has not been detected any further north of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge - which is about 40 miles north of Charleston, South Carolina.
- Entered data on *Opuntia engelmanni* in Walker Co, Georgia and *O. pusilla* in Oktibbeha Co., MS.

III. Modeling of *Opuntia* Distribution in the Region.

Task Description: We will develop spatial models to predict cactus distribution in a GIS framework.

Summary of Objectives:

1. Develop cactus distribution prediction models

Progress this month:

- Initiated assembly of data on natural cactus populations in the southeast and cactus moth infestations as part of initial stages in development of a project to better understand the landscape ecology of *Cactoblastis* spread.

IV. Cactus And Cactus Moth Extension Information.

Task Description: We will develop web-based information to aid in the identification of cactus and the cactus moth.

Summary of Objectives:

1. Web-based educational materials on cactus and the cactus moth
2. Educational program on cactus moth, including on-line and printed fact sheets and brochures.

Progress this month:

- Brown, R.L. 2007. Cactus Moth Survey. Horticultural Inspection Society Southern Chapter Meeting and In-Service Training. Greenville, MS. Sept. 19.

V. Web-based database for cactus and cactus moth distribution.

Task Description: We will develop a web-based avenue for reporting suspected locations on the web, and web GIS database to display the movement of the moth and locations of natural cactus populations. Webpage:

http://www.gri.msstate.edu/cactus_moth

Summary of Tasks:

1. Operational web database for locating and mapping cactus and cactus moth populations.

Progress this month:

- Historical data records from Florida Department of Food and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, have been added.

VI. Coordination.

Task Description: A collaborative project of this size involving multiple agencies requires a concerted effort to coordinate activities and agree on the tasks to be done and data to be collected.

Coordination activities this month:

- Participated in the monthly Invasive Species Working Group teleconference.

Publications:

Requested a review from Donald Pinkava prior to journal submission: Majure, L.C. and G. N. Ervin. 2007. The *Opuntia* of Mississippi.

Invited presentation: Ervin, G. N. 2007. Using GAP data to guide integrated management of invasive species. US Geological Survey National Gap Analysis Program Conference, Asheville, NC, 10-13 September 2007.

Baker, G.T. and R.L. Brown. 2007. Sensory structures of larval mouthparts of *Cactoblastis* and *Melitara* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae). European Congress of Lepidopterology. Berlin, Germany. 8-12 Sept. 2007. Poster.

Simonsen, T.J., R.L. Brown, & F. Sterling. 2007. Phylogeography of the invasive Cactus Moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) in the southeastern USA based on the mitochondrial gene COI. European Congress of Lepidopterology. Berlin, Germany. 8-12 Sept. 2007. Oral Presentation.

For more information, contact: Dr. John D. Madsen, ph. 662-325-2428 or jmadsen@gri.msstate.edu