

Moths and Beekeeping by Bernard Hocking

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As far as the books on moths go, they appear to think that the Lesser wax moth (*Achroia grisella*) and The greater wax moth (*Galleria mellonella*) are rare moths, to beekeepers nothing could be further from the truth.

Every beekeeper wages a continual battle trying to prevent these moths destroying his honeycombs and in the case of the greater wax moth, eating the wooden frames as well.

Although I have kept bees for over thirty years, I have very few photos of the greater wax moth as it is an automatic reaction to destroy any that I come across. The photo below is however, I think of one that I caught in my moth trap. I also burn any combs infested with Greater wax moth immediately so no photos of them either.



The greater wax moth (*Galleria mellonella*)

To open a bee hive that is infested with these pests is stomach-churning experience, imagine hundreds of squirming maggots about an inch long moving with surprising speed over what remains of the honeycombs, dropping off and racing across the ground.

A hive that has been attacked by this beast could release hundreds, even thousands of moths into the surrounding area, but of course they will immediately disappear into another beehive to carry on their destruction, unseen by most moth-ers.

Fortunately the Greater wax moth is not quite as common as the Lesser wax moth shown below.



The Lesser wax moth (*Achroia grisella*)

The Lesser wax moth can be found almost everywhere that there are bee hives or honeycombs, it is only interested in the beeswax and, as with the previous species, does not eat the honey. Any beeswax can be attacked, but it prefers the combs that have been used for rearing young bees, rather than those used for storing honey by the bees. It will though move on to these if not discovered by the beekeeper.

Any hive or remains of a wild swarm that is not occupied by honeybees will be reduced to a mass of cocoons and webs in a few weeks, all the wax being consumed, releasing thousands of adult moths. At least, though more common, these being smaller beasts, do not damage the wooden frames. See photographs below showing infested comb and larvae.



The Lesser wax moth (*Achroia grisella*) larvae in comb



The Lesser wax moth (*Achroia grisella*) larvae in comb

These photographs showing live larvae were taken on 30th November 2009. I think that they are active whenever it is warm enough for me to inspect my beehives, but assume that from late December to March they would not be breeding.

The moth shown below, a male Bee moth (*Aphomia sociella*), is not concerned with Honeybees but is thought to inhabit Bumblebee nests.



Bee moth (*Aphomia sociella*)

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<http://www.cornwallmothgroup.org.uk/download/moths-and-beekeeping.pdf>