

Colorado Insect of Interest

Locust Borer

Scientific Name: *Megacyllene robiniae* (Forster)

Order: Coleoptera (Beetles)

Family: Cerambycidae (Longhorned Beetles)

Identification and Descriptive Features: The adult beetle is a colorful insect, generally black beetles but marked with yellow cross bands on thorax and "W" shaped bands on the wing covers. They are about 18-22 mm in length and are most commonly observed visiting flowers in late



Figure 1. Locust borer adult.



Figure 2. Locust borer larvae in trunk.
Photograph by David Leatherman.

summer and early fall. Larvae are robust, cream colored, legless grubs with brown heads, about 2.5 cm when full grown.

Distribution in Colorado: This is an introduced species in the state but is now widely established in association with black locust (*Robinia*). Most records are from eastern Colorado but it is also known from Mesa County. Locally it may be very abundant and damaging to its host. In recent years it has been particularly damaging to the cultivar "Purple Robe" locust.

Life History and Habits: Adults are active in late summer and early fall when they may be commonly seen feeding on pollen of various flowers. Yellow flowers, notably goldenrod and rabbitbrush, are particularly favored.

Mating occurs on the trunk and females alternate between feeding and egg laying. Eggs are deposited in cracks and crevices in bark of the trunk of black locust. Larvae that hatch from the eggs bore into bark and construct small



Figure 3. Black locust showing evidence of infestation by locust borer.

hibernation cells for overwintering. The following spring they resume activity, tunneling extensively through the sapwood and ultimately move through the heartwood. Heavily infested plants may be riddled, causing substantial trunk weakening and inducing distortions of growth.

The larvae mature by the latter part of July and prior to pupation they may expel large amounts of sawdust from the infested trunk. They pupate within a chamber underneath the bark later emerging as adults. There is one generation produced per year.



Figure 4. Adult locust borers are most commonly seen in late summer as they visit yellow flowers to feed on pollen.