



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Coastal Heathland Cutworm
*Abagrotis benjamini***

State Status: **Special Concern**
Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: The Coastal Heathland Cutworm (*Abagrotis benjamini*) is a noctuid moth with a forewing length of 13-16 mm (Lafontaine 1998). The forewing ground color is reddish-brown, the outer margin frosted with a band of pale gray; there are two black wedges at the costal margin, one above the reniform spot and another above the antemedial line. The postmedial and antemedial lines are obscure, consisting of scales slightly more pale than the ground color. The reniform and orbicular spots range from faintly to prominently darker than the ground color. The hind wing is grayish-brown, darker toward the outer margin, with an obscure discal spot. The head and thorax are concolorous with the forewing ground color, and the abdomen is concolorous with the hind wing.

HABITAT: In Massachusetts, the Coastal Heathland Cutworm inhabits xeric and open coastal habitats on sandy soil, including sandplain grasslands, dunes and bluffs, coastal heathlands or other maritime shrublands, and occasionally open pitch pine/scrub oak barrens.

LIFE HISTORY: Adult Coastal Heathland Cutworm moths emerge from late June through July, with late-emerging or summer-aestivating individuals flying through the end of September. Larvae overwinter partially



Abagrotis benjamini • Specimen from CT: New London Co., Old Lyme, collected 21 Jul 2004 by G. Tyler

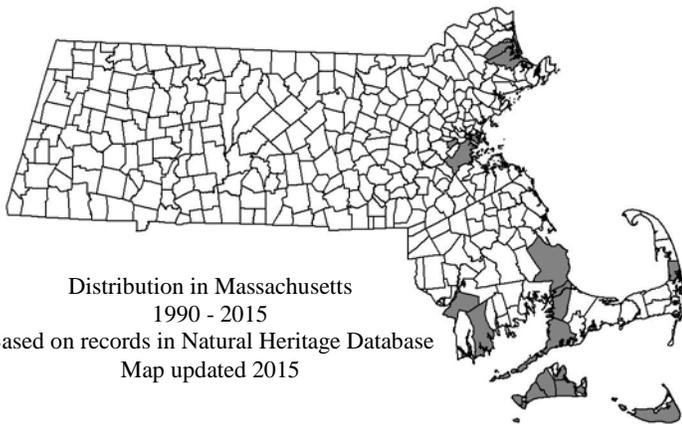
Adult Flight Period in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

grown, and resume feeding in the spring. The larval host plants in Massachusetts are undocumented, but probably consist of a variety of low-growing shrubs. In the western U.S., larvae have been found on shadbush (*Amelanchier*) and currant (*Ribes*) (Crumb 1956).

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: The Coastal Heathland Cutworm is widely distributed across western North America, from southern British Columbia to southern California, east to Alberta and New Mexico; in the East, it is limited to the Atlantic Coastal Plain from New Brunswick south to New Jersey (Lafontaine 1998). In Massachusetts, it occurs along the coast from the North Shore south to Boston and Plymouth, on Cape Cod and the offshore islands, and west to Dartmouth.

STATUS AND THREATS: The Coastal Heathland Cutworm is threatened by habitat loss and fire



A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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suppression. Other potential threats include introduced generalist parasitoids, aerial insecticide spraying, non-target herbiciding, off-road vehicles, and light pollution.

Literature Cited

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