



Caterpillars of *Uresiphita reversalis* feeding on plants of Mescal Bean. The insects disfigure and weaken the plant. Control measures discussed below are recommended to halt the advance of this destructive insect. Photographs by Carol D. Crosswhite.

Damage to Mescal Bean (*Sophora secundiflora*) by a Pyralid Moth (*Uresiphita reversalis*)

Mescal Bean (*Sophora secundiflora*), also known as Texas Mountain Laurel, is rather widely planted in arid regions as a small specimen tree, as a hedge or screen, or silhouetted against a structure as an espalier. The seeds are well-documented as being poisonous and many gardening or landscaping books recommend removing them before maturity. The desirable features of the plant are the beautiful deeply violet-blue flowers which resemble *Wisteria* and the thick, leathery deep green leaves which seem to resist the coldest of winters. Books treat the species as pest-free or at least fail to mention any pests. For example, Mary Rose Duffield and Warren D. Jones in their excellent book *Plants for Dry Climates* state that no maintenance is required for Mescal Bean other than occasional pruning and training. Therefore it is somewhat distressing in recent years to find this handsome plant infested with caterpillars of a moth in the family Pyralidae.

The moth has been identified as *Uresiphita reversalis* [Guenee] by Dr. D.M. Weisman of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. It seems to have appeared at the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum on plants of Mescal Bean (see photos) in 1981. Specimens are present, however, in the insect collection of the Arizona Commission of Agriculture and Horticulture going back to 1975 on "Spanish Broom" at Casa Grande, on Texas Mountain Laurel in Sun City in 1978, and on both *Genista* and *Sophora secundiflora* in 1980 in Phoenix. It has been seen to be a problem on roadside plantings of *Sophora* made in recent years by the Arizona Department of Transportation and severely

infested seedling crops of *Sophora* at two wholesale nurseries in Phoenix. One outbreak was controlled using *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a strain of bacteria which causes the caterpillars to sicken and die. Warren D. Jones reports that he has seen what could be this caterpillar feeding on cultivated plants of *Sophora arizonica* in Tucson. A number of horticulturists and nurserymen were contacted who are quite knowledgeable and know *Sophora* well. They were mostly unaware of the moth or cited the same nursery infestations mentioned above.

Eugene Munroe treats *Uresiphita reversalis* on page 57 (fascicle 13.2) of R.B. Dominick's *Moths of America North of Mexico* published in 1976 (London, E.W. Classey). It is said to be an occasional pest of nursery stock and ornamental plantings, *Genista*, *Lupinus*, *Baptisia*, *Sophora* and *Lonicera* being mentioned as food plants. Dr. D.M. Weisman (USDA) had identified it on *Laburnum* in Kansas, Nebraska and Maryland, on *Lupinus* or "Blue Bonnets" in Texas and New York, on *Genista* in California and Arizona, on *Spartium*? in Georgia, on *Acacia*? in Texas, and on *Sophora secundiflora* in Texas and Arizona.

All records from Arizona seem to be from cultivated plants. If there is no significant reservoir on wild plants here, it might be possible to eradicate it on the cultivated ones. *Bacillus thuringiensis* should be tried first, then Sevin, then diazinon, according to label directions. Insecticides should be initially tried on a few leaves to make certain no burn occurs. Safer's agrichemical soap could be used but might be even less safe in terms of phytotoxicity. Always test it first. — Carol D. Crosswhite, Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum; and Cay Randall, Arizona Commission of Agriculture and Horticulture.