

Venus Flytrap Cutworm Depends on Venus Flytrap

–By Laurie Hamon

Venus flytrap is famous for its insect-munching habit, but this doesn't deter many insects from biting back. Indeed, for one very rare moth species, Venus flytrap is a favorite food.

The Venus flytrap cutworm (*Hemipachnobia subporphyrea*) is an understated, purple-brown moth that flies in early spring. As a caterpillar, this species depends almost exclusively on Venus flytrap as a host plant, chewing tiny holes in the traps when the caterpillar is young, then devouring whole leaves as it grows.



This might sound like a pest species to flytrap enthusiasts, but the Venus flytrap cutworm is a fascinating part of Venus flytrap's ecological story. It's also exceedingly rare. Only a few dozen individuals have been observed since the species was first described in the 18th century. Since the moth depends on Venus flytrap, it faces the same threats as its host plant – fire suppression, development, and illegal collection of flytraps.

Ironically, Venus flytrap cutworm may also be threatened by fire. Unlike the flytraps, which survive the fire as underground rhizomes, many overground insect populations instead persist through a strategy of extinction and movement – when fire wipes out one area, individuals from unburned areas move in to take their place. If an entire flytrap population is burned at once, it's possible that the moth can't survive. Consequently, burning landscapes as a patchwork or as parcels as much as possible may be an approach to protecting the cutworm and other insects.

If you have flytraps on your property, keep an eye out for signs of feeding damage and frass (bug poop) on your plants. You may have a very rare species in your midst. The story of the Venus flytrap cutworm demonstrates that when we protect rare plants, we're not just protecting the plant – we're also protecting all the other organisms that rely on that plant for food and shelter.

Above: Venus flytrap cutworm larva on a flytrap (photo by Laurie Hamon)

Work by lepidopterist Bo Sullivan is a major reason why we know what we do about Venus flytrap cutworm. Bo passed away in October 2024. Learn more about Bo and his work describing North Carolina moths at the [North Carolina Biodiversity Project moth page](#).