Winter Moth May 2011 UMass Cranberry Station

1st instar winter moth larva, 1-2 millimeters in size

2nd instar winter moth larva, 3 millimeters in size

Size of small winter moth larvae on the rim of a medium Dunkin Donuts cup

bigger larva with white stripes

Winter moth has long been a pest in Europe and likely made its way into the US via Canada. It has only appeared in southeastern Massachusetts in the last 12 years and on cranberry in the last 6. Unfortunately, the larvae hatch early in the spring and can do much damage before sweeping begins. There have been reported losses in cranberry from winter moth after the fact and high counts (50-100) of larvae have been found in the spring in sweep sets on cranberry bogs.

Winter moth prefer fruit trees such as apple, crabapple, cherry and blueberry. When given a choice, they will abandon cranberry, but when not given a choice, the larvae will eat cranberry. Because the female moths do not fly, if the female develops on cranberry, many eggs will be laid there for the following year. If you have seen a flight of brown moths over or near your bog in November and December last year, it likely means there was a female there and the eggs are too.

When winter moth first hatch they look a lot like tiny black-headed fireworm. Black-headed fireworm are much more active and will wriggle when touched. As soon as winter moth gets bigger it starts looping and loses its black head. At this point, its color can range from yellow to green to dungy green. Once larger, winter moth look like our typical green spanworms but tend to be fatter or bulkier than regular green spanworm. Winter moth hatch mid-April and feed through May. They are done by the end of May and drop to the ground to pupate! Moths will not fly until October, November, and even December.