

Colorado Insect of Interest

Multi-plumed Moth (Montana Six-plume Moth)

Scientific Name: *Alucita montana* Barnes and Lindsay

Order: Lepidoptera (Moths, Butterflies, Skippers)

Family: Alucitidae (Many-plume moths)

Identification and Descriptive Features:

This is a moth of unique appearance, due to the presence of a “multi-plumed” hindwing. This is deeply cleft producing the appearance of multiple plumes giving it fringed appearance and when the insect is at rest they are often spread and easily visible. The moth is of moderate size, with a wingspan of 11-14 mm. The wings are pale gray, with wavy banding of faint brown running across the wings.

Distribution in Colorado: This species appears to be restricted to upper elevation, forested areas of the state. Potentially it could be found in other sites where there are plantings of snowberry, the larval host plant.

Life History and Habits: The caterpillar stage of the multi-plumed moth develops as a leafminer in snowberry (*Symphoricarpos* spp.), which would be the native host for the insect in Colorado. It is also reported to develop in honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.). Damage is negligible to these plants and rarely even noticed.

What attracts attention, aside from the unusual appearance of the moth, is that this species frequently enters buildings in autumn as it searches for sites to survive winter. It is unusual in this habit, few other moths spend winter in an adult stage and almost none regularly use homes/buildings for winter shelter in Colorado. Indoors the moth is a curiosity, but causes no injuries to anything and does not feed nor reproduce indoors. It is strictly a temporary “nuisance invader” of Colorado buildings.



Figures 1a,b. Adults of the multi-plumed moth *Alucita montana*, found within a cabin.

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