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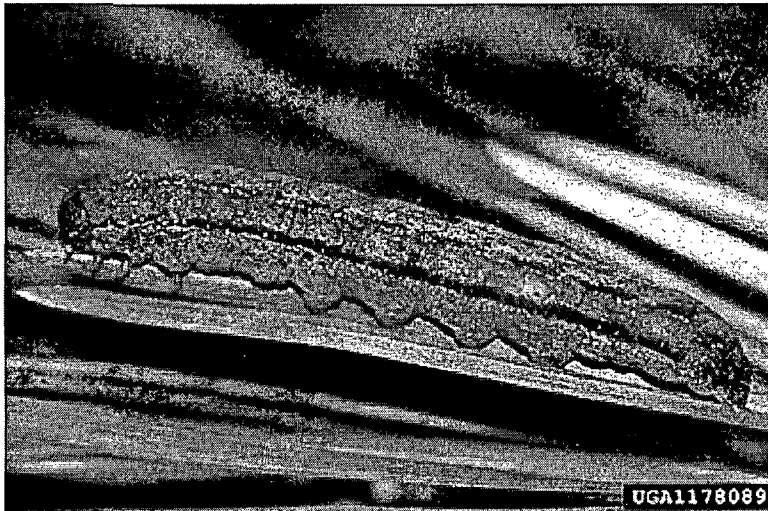
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## Variable Climbing Caterpillar (*Xestia elimata*)

Maier, C.T., C.R. Lemmon, J.M. Fengler, D.F. Schweitzer, and R.C. Reardon. 2004. *Caterpillars on the Foliage of Conifers in the Northeastern United States*. FHTET-2004-1. Morgantown, WV: USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team; 151 p.

**Description.** Speckled, grayish brown body with dark brown spiracular stripe; variable body color. Brown head with dark brown streak down lobes to frons (extension of subdorsal stripe) and with reticulation elsewhere. White middorsal stripe; remainder of dorsum light grayish brown with row of paired, offset, dark brown spots on each side of segments; intermittent, white subdorsal stripe trimmed with dark brown mainly above. Distinct, dark brown spiracular stripe; body lightly speckled with white laterally; light brown or grayish brown below yellowish spiracles. Up to 30 mm.

**Food.** Pitch, red, and other hard pines.

**Life Cycle.** One generation. Partly grown to mature caterpillar overwinters in soil or debris. Mature caterpillar present on foliage in October and from April to June in New England, and from October to April in southern New Jersey.

**Comments.** The mature caterpillar of this species also has a common grayish brown form and a scarce green form. This species has another appropriate common name, the chameleon caterpillar. Normally, the

brownish last instars of *Xestia* species feed at night. Occasionally, the last instar of the variable climbing caterpillar will climb trees to feed during exceptionally warm periods in the winter. Before forming a pupa, this caterpillar constructs a chamber in the soil where it may remain dormant for 2 to 8 months. In some areas, the last instars of *Xestia* are easily collected at sugar baits in the fall and the spring.

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