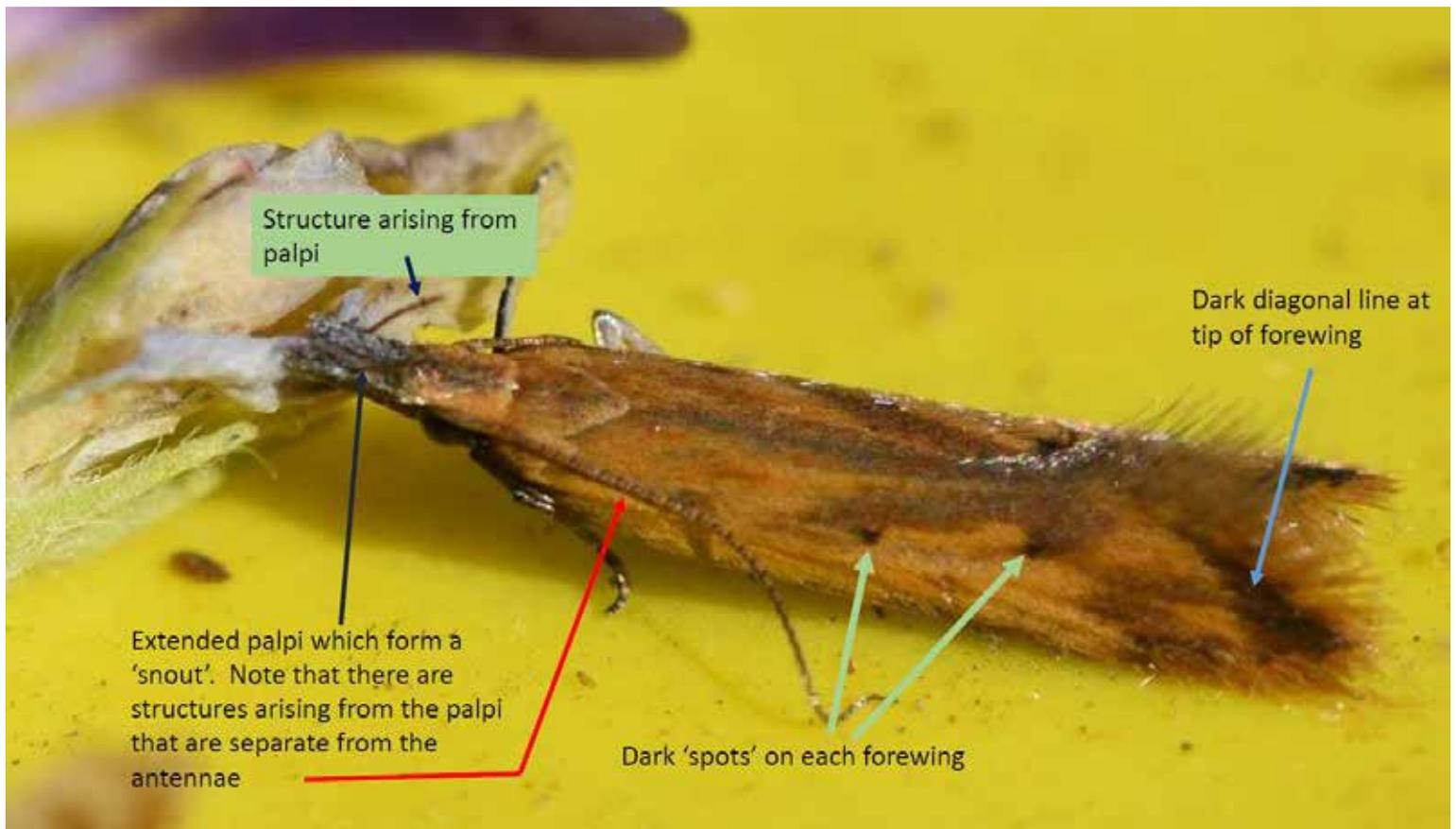


A New Caterpillar Pest, *Dichomeris Acuminatus* Reported for the First Time in Us Alfalfa Crops

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Alfalfa hay fields in the Imperial Valley of California and Yuma County of Arizona, have been found to be infested by larvae of the alfalfa leaftier *Dichomeris acuminatus* (Staudinger, 1876), a caterpillar pest not previously reported to damage alfalfa in the United States. The distinct feeding by this pest results in 2 leaves folded or 2-3 leaves tied together to create a shell-like structure, hence the name 'alfalfa leaftier'. Caterpillars feed on leaf tissues living within these structures. Host plants in addition to alfalfa include various legumes such as sesbania, soybean (*Glycine max*), pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan*), and white clover (*Trifolium repens*). Females deposit individual eggs on the upper surface of leaves, and are usually pale red in color, small, round with smooth surface. Caterpillars are usually light green in color during their early instar stages and may turn yellowish in color towards the last instar, when ready for pupation. Caterpillars are small and somewhat tapered on both ends, with a shiny, black head and a dark, sclerotized first thoracic segment. Full grown caterpillars can be up to 8 mm long and mostly stay inside the rolled leaf and covered with silken thread as they are ready for pupation. Pupae are usually orange to black in color and about 6 mm long. Damage can depend on the number of caterpillars present on the stem and the growth stage of the crop. Under low pest pressure, the damage symptom is usually restricted to the terminals of a plant. However, presence of several caterpillars (3-4 per stem) can result in significant damage to leaves throughout the plant.



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