RARE SPECIES OF MASSACHUSETTS

Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth

*Hemaris gracilis*

Massachusetts Status: Special Concern
Federal Status: None

**DESCRIPTION**

The Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth (*Hemaris gracilis*) is a day-flying sphingid moth with a wingspan of 40-45 mm (Covell 1984). Both the forewing and the hind wing are unscaled and transparent except for reddish-brown margins and narrow lines of the same color along the wing veins. Dorsally, the head and thorax are olive green in color when fresh, fading to yellowish-green; the abdomen is banded with green concolorous with the head and thorax, reddish-brown concolorous with the wings, black, and white. The tip of the abdomen has a brush of hair-like scales that are orange medially, flanked with black. Of the three day-flying sphinx moths (*Hemaris* spp.) in Massachusetts, the Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth is most easily confused with the Hummingbird Clearwing (*Hemaris thysbe*). However, the Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth has a lateral reddish-brown stripe on the thorax, extending from the eye to the abdomen, that is absent on the Hummingbird Clearwing.

**POPULATION STATUS**

The Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth is threatened by habitat loss and fire suppression. Other potential threats include introduced generalist parasitoids, aerial insecticide spraying, non-target herbiciding, and off-road vehicles.

**RANGE**

The Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth is found from Labrador south to New Jersey, and west to Saskatchewan, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Illinois; it also occurs along the Atlantic coastal plain from New Jersey south to Florida (Tuttle 2007). It is rare and locally distributed throughout its range. In Massachusetts, the Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth is known to occur in Franklin County and adjacent northern and western Worcester County, as well as in Plymouth and on Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard.

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HABITAT
The Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth inhabits pitch pine-scrub oak barrens and heathlands on sandplains or rocky summits and ridges, as well as acidic bogs and swamps.

LIFE CYCLE AND BEHAVIOR
In Massachusetts, the Slender Clearwing Sphinx Moth flies in May and June. Adults are diurnal and hover to nectar at flowers, especially blueberry (Vaccinium). Larvae feed on lowbush blueberry (Vaccinium pallidum), and probably other blueberry species, from June until pupation in July. Pupae overwinter.

ADULT FLIGHT PERIOD IN MASSACHUSETTS

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REFERENCES


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M.W. Nelson