ECB or Smartweed Borer

I received an e-mail on Thursday about an individual noticing “extremely high number of moths in and around milo fields near the Dalhart area”. He identified them as European corn borer moths and wanted to know if milo could be damaged. Also, he said a consultant had seen European corn borer (ECB) eggs on milo leaves. Since I do not have much experience with ECB, I contacted Dr. Pat Porter, Extension Entomologist - Lubbock to see if he knew about ECB getting in milo fields. He said he had a similar call from Scott Russell, IPM agent at Brownfield. The moths turned out to be the Smartweed borer which looks very similar to the ECB and is a close relative (see photos).

The description of the smartweed borer, *Ostrinia obumbratalis*, the eggs - Flat, thin, scalelike, laid in flat masses or rows of 4 to 16 like shingles overlapping each other. Nearly transparent when first laid and soon becomes more opaque. As the embryo develops the dark head of the larva can be seen in the egg. The moths lay eggs on the underside of the leaves. The larvae also closely resemble ECB larvae. The most reliable characteristic for separating the two species are small hairs on the larval head. The host range for the smartweed borer are primarily different weeds, cocklebur, ragweed, cat-tail and lamb’s quarter. But late in the season they can be found in corn, cotton, and goldenrod. The text books do not mention grain sorghum as an alternative host, but that is not to mean the larvae could not borer into the sorghum stalk.

So, the question is what are we seeing in the Northern Panhandle. Without having specimen to compare, I can not say with any certainty of the species present. But with all of the rains and the flush of all kinds of weeds, then the moths could be the smartweed borer. Scouting will tell if there is egg laying, regardless of the moth species, on grain sorghum, corn, cotton, etc. If we find eggs in corn, grain sorghum, and cotton that resemble ECB eggs, there is a possibility they could be ECB. There is not a any thresholds for the smartweed borer, but there is an established threshold for ECB eggs in corn. The threshold for making an application is when 10 to 20 hatched or un-hatched egg masses can be found per 100 plants. And, Texas does not have any established thresholds for ECB in cotton and grain sorghum.