

PEST CONTROL IN COCONUT CULTIVATION

J. K. F. Kirthisinghe

The science and practise of pest control in coconut cultivation has received greater emphasis since recent times. The study and control of pests and diseases is a necessary adjunct to other agronomic principles and practices that are adopted to make all the best in coconut planting. From the volume of inquiries received, it is evident that the need for crop protection is now being realised with increasing interest by planters.

Among the pests of the coconut palm, in this country, the most destructive is the Red Weevil, entomologically termed, *Rhyncophorus ferrugineus*. The weevil is a reddish brown insect about 1½ inches long. It bears a snout on its head. The female lays eggs on open fresh wounds on the palms. The grubs that hatch out bore into the tree, wherein, they breed through into pupae in cocoons and emerge as adult weevils. The palm usually succumbs to the damage caused when the pest develops into a heavy infestation within the tree.

Three contributory conditions for out-breaks of this pest are (1) the increase of young plantations with the replanting scheme in progress, (2) neglect in the practise of phytosanitation and (3) ineffective preventive treatment.

Vigilance, is the first step in the control of this pest, particularly, in areas where it is known to occur in abundance. Frequent inspection of young palms is necessary to treat wounds with tar or a wound dressing. Infested palms are given an injection of the insecticide Metasystox, to kill the insects within the tree and prevent scooping and removal of the pest material which has to be done if the chemical treatment is not given. Palms which are infested beyond recovery, should be cut and burnt thoroughly.

In the course of carrying out control programmes, it has been observed that the pest is tending to increase but it has its own limitations also, which checks the spread. With lack of attention, there should be no surprise, if this pest becomes a greater menace in the future. In spite of advice and warnings for the exercise of adequate attention with respect to prevention as mentioned earlier, there appears to be insufficient cooperation, especially from caretakers of small holdings. Recommendations for the control of the Red Weevil pest are described in the C.R.I. Leaflet No. 37.

There are a number of leaf eating caterpillars that are pests on the coconut palm. The most important of them is commonly known as the 'Coconut Caterpillar' and entomologically-termed *Nephantis serinopa*.

