

Coconut Caterpillar

The Coconut Caterpillar pest is found mainly in the Western, North Western, Southern and Eastern Provinces. The female moth of the Coconut Caterpillar lays eggs on the lower surface of older leaflets. About 300 eggs are laid by one female. The eggs hatch into tiny black-headed caterpillars which are pinkish in colour. They soon turn into creamy white. The fully grown caterpillar (about 15 mm long) grown into a resting stage (pupa) from which adult moth emerges. The caterpillar feeds on the green tissue of the leaf resulting in dried brownish patches. At the same time, the caterpillars make galleries out of frass. When a large number of caterpillars are present, heavy feeding would result in a large proportion of the leaf turning brown.

This pest was controlled by the use of insecticides before 1957. Later the Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka established an insectary at Lunuwila and began to breed different types of parasites to control the caterpillar pest. Another insectary was also established in the Eastern Province in Batticaloa.

In breeding these parasites a fair amount of man power and materials are being utilized. Different types of parasites are being bred in the insectary for which trained personnel are being made use of. To maintain a continuous supply of parasites to meet the demand, a fair amount of money is being spent. Parasites are sent to coconut plantations affected by the pest by post free of charge. The coconut growers should release the parasites according to instructions sent to them along with parasites. After release box with glass tubes should be returned by post. Without proper co-operation from growers it will not be possible to control pest by biological means.

By M. S. Velu