

DONKEYS AND BEAUTY CONTESTS IN THE CONTROL OF THE BLACK BEETLE OF COCONUT

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Oryctes sp., commonly known as the Rhinoceros Beetle, is a well known beetle pest of coconut and palmyra in India, Burma, Ceylon, Siam, Hainam, Philippines, Indo-China, Malay Peninsula, Indonesia and Africa. It is known by a variety of names in different countries such as 'Indian Rhinoceros Beetle', 'Black Beetle', 'Big-Beetle', 'Coconut Helmet Beetle' etc. The adult beetle bores into unopened tender fronds, chews the fibrous matter and throws it out as a dry mass. When the leaf opens, the injury can be clearly seen in the form of a series of holes. Young palms die, when severely damaged by this beetle.

Prophylactic measures like plant and field sanitation are usually adopted to control the pest. Stumps of dead palms standing in the estate, are ideal breeding places for the beetle. Hence, cutting and splitting open all dead palms in the estate will prevent the beetle from breeding, thereby reducing their population to a large extent. Breeding of the beetles also takes place in manure heaps and this could be avoided by treating the heaps with Benzene Hexachloride.

Besides the usual methods of control mentioned above, there are two popular methods adopted in Ceylon and in the Philippines for the control of this beetle pest.

In Ceylon, there is a popular belief that the braying of donkeys causes splitting in the heads of the beetles thereby causing their death. Although this belief has not been scientifically proved so far, still many of the coconut planters in the Eastern and Northern Provinces of Ceylon firmly believe in it and are found maintaining donkeys on their estates. The author has however noted that the Black beetle is readily attracted by the strong odour of the dung and urine of the donkey. The beetle oviposits its eggs on the dung, but these were found not developing either due to the toxic action of the dung on the eggs or due to the fact that the dung dried up too quickly.

In the Philippines, where the beetle is also a pest, beauty contests are held periodically. These contests are considered to be very popular. People vote for the girl of their choice. Voting is very brisk except for the fact that it differs from the normal voting in two ways. Firstly, instead of the ballot paper only grubs of the Black-beetle have to be deposited in the ballot boxes and secondly, a single voter is permitted to deposit as many votes as possible for the belle he wishes to see elected! It is claimed that polling is rather heavy with the results that there is an appreciable control of the beetle pest in the country.