

THE STINGING CATERPILLAR

A Note on *Parasa lepida*

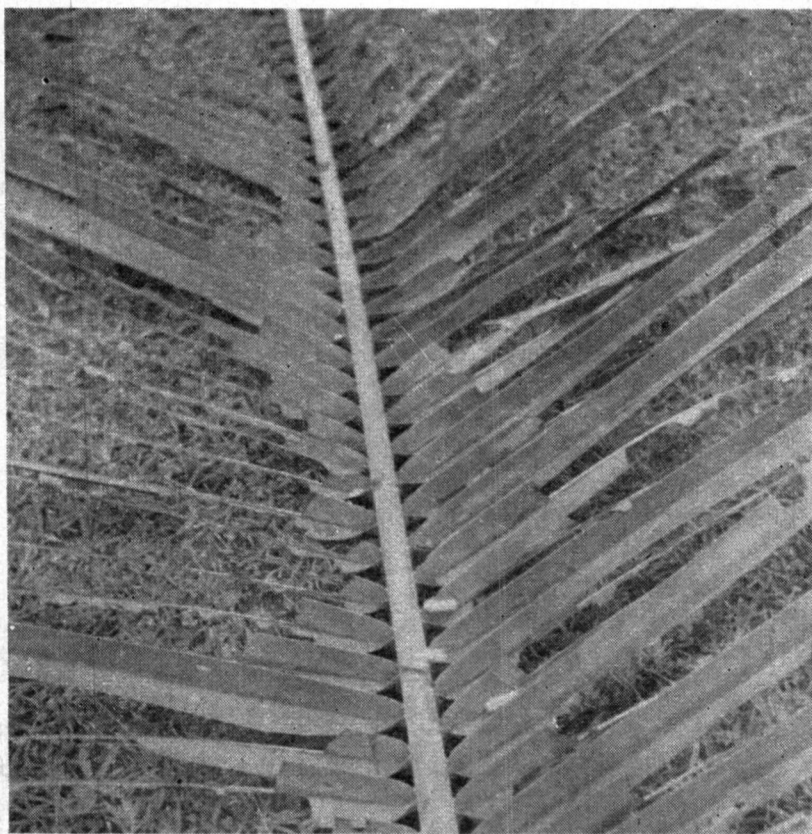


One of the palms attacked by "parasa lepida."

NOT long ago a severe outbreak of *Parasa lepida*, commonly known as the green-striped or blue-striped nettle grub, was reported from an Estate in the Chilaw District. The attack was confined to the leaflets of mature coconut palms situated more or less in the same block.

The occurrence of this large "nettle grub" has previously been recorded by other estates in this district, but only in small numbers and not causing any serious damage. It is an occasional pest of coconut leaves and has usually been reported during the months of January and August. The actual damage done is to the coconut leaflets which are consumed almost completely, only the ekels being left by the caterpillars. The caterpillar is yellowish green, with a greenish blue

stripe on the dorsal side of the body. On its body there are stinging hairs which cause intense irritation when touched. The cocoons are brown, elliptical and hemispherical bodies with a protective covering of a fringe of hairs. These also should not be handled. The moths emerge after some time from their cocoons and later deposit the eggs on the leaves to continue the life cycle.



Stinging caterpillars on a coconut frond.

Parasa lepida is controlled naturally by parasites, but these usually only appear after some damage has been done. The Entomologist of the Department of Agriculture, reports that nearly 95 per cent. of the caterpillars were parasitized at the stage when the insecticidal control measures were taken. The pest was brought completely under control chemically by using a DDT emulsion preparation as directed by the Entomologist, Department of Agriculture, Peradeniya. A power sprayer loaned from Messrs. A. Baur & Co., Ltd., was used in the spraying after suitably mounting it on an improvised tower on a lorry.

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