

NEW MENACE ON COCONUT ESTATES: EUPATORIUM ODORATUM SPREADS INTO THE COCONUT ESTATES

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In the Coconut Planters' Review, Vol. 1 No. 4, pages 16-17 publicity was given in the serial article on "WEEDS ON COCONUT LANDS AND THEIR CONTROL" by the Director, regarding the exotic weed called *Eupatorium Odoratum* which is gradually spreading on to the coconut estates.

Since that article was published in April 1961, now (nearly 2 years later), the position regarding the spread of this weed is almost alarming. From the Southern Province where it has established a strong foot-hold, it has now spread to coconut estates in the Gampaha, Veyangoda, Alawwa, and Kurunegala and also in the Chilaw District not far from the Coconut Research Institute.

There are several abandoned Crown Lands, on which food production has been carried out during the second World War, where the weed has become a focus of infestation, after the plant flowers during December/January, the wind-blown seeds are carried long distances and deposited on coconut lands where they germinate colonising new soil.

On a recent observation tour it was found that it is establishing itself in the Nattandiya-Kuliyapitiya areas and other coconut lands where it has not been observed before.

As mentioned in the previous article this weed is a woody-shrub which grows erect reaching the height of 5-6 feet and in a short time almost becomes scrub jungle.

Control is best effected when scattered plants which form small infestations are removed by systematic uprooting, i.e. by pulling out the plants in the early stage when ground is soft after the shower of rain.

As mentioned in the earlier article once established uprooting is an expensive problem. The tap root is massive and deep and unless it is completely pulled out, and if only cut at ground level, fresh growth begins and numerous branches reappear. It is easy to uproot in the early stages, as otherwise the root becomes bulbous.

Recently it was reported from India that a gall fly, *Procecidochares utilis* is a specific parasite of *Eupatorium grandulosium*. It is not effective against *E. odoratum* but a search in this country may reveal a parasite specific to *E. odoratum*.

Unless this menace is controlled by a systematic drive it is feared that many coconut estates will soon become Eupatoria jungle. Although it has been reported that weedicides could be used to control *Eupatorium odoratum* it is a very expensive item today.

Besides pursuant to our representations to the Director of Agriculture we have been informed that it has been decided, at our request, to declare *Eupatorium odoratum* as a pest under the Plant Pest Ordinance. Legislation can do very little without the co-operation of coconut landowners, both small and big, and we make an earnest appeal to everybody concerned to make an honest endeavour to eradicate this weed which is a very serious menace on coconut estates today.



"Eupatoria Jungle"