

Technique to control major coconut pest

Researchers at the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI), India, have developed a biological control method to tackle Rhinoceros beetle, a major coconut pest that causes 30-90 per cent damage to crops. In this method, Rhinoceros beetle can be permanently controlled by releasing other beetles infected with a baculovirus in coconut fields. The virus infests both the grubs and adults of the beetles.

The virus-infected beetles are collected manually from breeding grounds or by deploying the “Sime RB pheromone traps” and then released in the fields. The virus is transmitted by excreta contamination and while mating with a healthy partner. Unlike most other crops, coconut palms are damaged by pests at the adult stage. The extent of damage may vary from 30 to 90 per cent. The beetle burrows the crown and chews up the tissues which show a characteristic ‘V’ shaped cut on them.

Baculovirus, when released in the fields, infect beetle grubs. As a result, the pest larvae becomes lethargic, stops feeding and dies within 15-20 days. In adults, infection leads to sluggishness and they stop feeding. It has been proved that this virus alone can bring down pest population to a very low level. Other methods such as hooking, destruction of breeding sites on the palm and complete sanitation of plantations can be used in combination with this method. (Chemical weekly, 8 August 2000)