

Black-headed Caterpillar Disease

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Black-headed Caterpillar Disease Latest News

Recently, the Chief Minister of Karnataka has sought a report from the Horticulture Department on the reported threat posed by the black-headed caterpillar (*Opisina arenosella*) disease to the coconut plantation across the state.

About Black-headed Caterpillar Disease

- It causes serious damage to **coconut trees in both coastal and inland regions**.
- The caterpillars reside in silken galleries **built on the undersides of leaves** and consume the green portions, **reducing** the **plant's photosynthetic ability**.
- The pest spreads rapidly through wind dispersal.
- It **occurs round the year** with the spike in population during summer.
- **Control Strategy:** It can be controlled by using **neem-based pesticides**, root nourishment and release of *Goniozus parasitoids* along with integrated nutrient management.

- **Goniozus nephantidis** is the most widely used parasitoid of *Opisina arenosella*. The parasitoid is being mass multiplied and released in Karnataka, Kerala and several other states.

Symptoms of Black-headed Caterpillar Disease

- It infests coconut of all age groups and is a prolific **feeder of coconut leaves**.
- Dried up patches on leaflets of the lower leaves, only three or four youngest leaves at the center of the growth remain green.
- In case of severe infestation the whole plantations **present a scorched appearance**.
- The attacked leaves droop, bunches buckle and the immature nuts are shed heavily, in extreme cases feeding by the caterpillar on the green nut surface is also observed.

Source: TH

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