

Coconut Spathe Bug

Farmer
Fact Sheet

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What is it?

It is an insect that attacks coconuts and also betel nuts. The scientific name is *Axiagastus*. The spathe is the cover of the coconut flower.

Damage

The bug (photo, left) occurs in large numbers on the young male and female flowers, using its long needle-like mouth parts to suck the sap. There is loss of young nuts when populations are high, and outbreaks on Santa Cruz (Nendo Island) are thought to have caused coconuts to become dry and banana-shaped (photo, right), but it is uncertain if *Axiagastus* was the cause.



How do I identify it?

Look for dark brown bugs with yellow marks, about 15 mm long (photo, left, is a spathe bug that occurs outside Solomon Islands). The bug has a strong unpleasant smell when held or disturbed. Look for the long piercing mouthparts on both young and adults, which are used to suck sap from flowers and young fruit. Their feeding in this way is thought to causes nut fall, as well as damage to those nuts that remain, so that they become long and thin, without “meat” and “milk”.

How to manage the coconut spathe bug

NATURAL ENEMIES

- Wasps and flies that attack eggs, nymph and adults have been found in Papua New Guinea and probably also occur in Solomon Islands.
- Ants reduce populations of the bug, so plant soursops among coconuts to attract colonies of *Oecophylla*, the weaver ant.

CHEMICAL CONTROL

The use of insecticides is not recommended. It is difficult and uneconomic to spray mature coconuts. Insecticides will also kill the natural enemies.

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