

Ratoon shootborer

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Ephysteris promptella

Distribution

Ratoon shoot borer has damaged cane at Meringa, the Herbert Valley, Proserpine, Mackay and Sarina, but occurs as far south as Brisbane. It is widespread in the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia.

Damage

Caterpillars bore into young shoots, often killing them and causing 'dead hearts'. If the bottom leaves of the shoot are removed, the tiny pin-hole entrance to the tunnel can be seen. Damage is only in ratoons, with worst damage in crops harvested mid-season. All reports of severe damage have occurred under drought conditions.

Description

Eggs are pale green-yellow, flecked with shiny blue and gold-pink, and are 0.7 mm by 0.4 mm. Caterpillars are yellow and about 5 mm long (Photo 1). Pupae are boat-shaped, about 4 mm by 1 mm, and are wrapped in a frail cocoon of silk covered with frass.

Adult moths are 3-4 mm long with a wingspan of 7-10 mm; males are smaller than females. The wings are dark grey with white flecks on females and black dots on males.

Biology

Eggs are laid on the cane stalk and probably take a few days to hatch. Caterpillars tunnel into the stalk and eat the juicy bottom part. More than one stalk may be attacked by each larva. Pupae occur on the soil surface or in dead twisted leaves. Adults emerge 10-14 days after pupation.



Photo 1: Ratoon shoot borer caterpillar.

Management

No insecticides are registered to control this insect. Caterpillars are well hidden and most damage has been done by the time the insect is found.