Rhyparida

Black leaf beetle
Rhyparida nitida

Sugarcane leaf beetle
Rhyparida dimidiata

Distribution

Rhyparida beetles occur in the central and southern districts with records of minor damage in the Lower Burdekin and at Ingham.

Damage

In September-November small grubs bore into the bases of shoots, causing dead hearts (Photo 1). Damage is most frequent in ratoons, but can occur in plant cane. Heavy attack may kill all shoots, and also the stool. Less severe attack may only weaken the stool, and mild attack may kill only ‘surplus’ shoots, the loss of which will not affect ultimate yield. Damage more often occurs in grassy fields.

Beetles eat sugarcane leaves, giving them a tattered appearance, but cause no economic damage.

Description

Grubs of both species are stout with a yellow-grey body and a shiny red-brown head. They are about 9 mm long when fully grown.

Sugarcane leaf beetles are 6-7 mm long, brown coloured, with straighter sides (Photo 2). Black leaf beetles are about 6 mm long, dark shining black, and have a rounded outline (Photo 3).

Biology

Grubs are active in spring and become adults by December-February. Beetles of black leaf beetle may be found on taller grasses, and are often on cane leaves in large numbers. Beetles of sugarcane leaf beetle often shelter on or under bark of Moreton Bay ash or blue gum. Behaviour of both species between early summer and spring is unknown.

Management

By the time damage is seen it is too late to attempt control. No insecticides are registered to control these pests in sugarcane.

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