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RESEACH NEWS

GINGER RHIZOME FLY (*Mimegralla coeruleifrons* Macq.; DIPTERA:MICROPEZIDAE): A NEW PEST OF GINGER IN SRI LANKA

L.D. GALANIHE and K.J.P.K. KAHAWATTE
Horticultural Crops Research and Development Institute, Gannoruwa, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc.) is an important spice crop cultivated in Sri Lanka for dried rhizomes as spices and also used in the manufacturing of beverage. It is grown extensively in the Central and Western Provinces of the country. There are 16 pest species that causing damage to ginger recorded in Asia. Out of these, five species namely, shoot borer (*Dichocrocis punctiferalis*), ginger maggot (*Calabota* spp.) a beetle (*Lyctus africanus*), thrips (*Panchaeothrips indicus*) and a scale insect (*Aspidiella hartii*) have been recorded to be damaging ginger in Sri Lanka, and among them the shoot borer is considered as the major pest of ginger in Sri Lanka.

Ginger cultivations at Hataraliyadde area in Sri Lanka were reported to have severely damaged by an unknown pest problem in 2011. The damage symptoms were similar to those of a fungal disease and the attempts made to control the problem using fungicides by the researchers at Horticultural Crops Research and Development Institute (HORDI) Sri Lanka were not successful. Therefore, identifying the causal agent was a necessity.

An unknown insect was found on the ginger foliage in the damaged crop and the damaged plants and rhizome samples were collected from the field. Maggots of a Dipteran pest were found feeding inside the damaged rhizomes those were dissected under microscope. The same insect, as observed in the damaged fields, emerged from the samples of damaged ginger rhizomes collected. Damage assessment in the field showed that the level of damaged to the plants could go up to 93 %. The damage was high and spreading rapidly when the rains coincided with the pest infestation as it would have facilitated the soil fungi and other pests to cause rotting of the rhizomes. The pest was identified as the rhizome fly (*Mimegralla coeruleifrons*; Diptera: Micropezidae). Identification of the soil fungi involved and its relationship with the pest required to be further investigated for developing control measures.