NZ Forage Systems Fact Sheet

Pests of Plantain - Plantain moth

Key Points

1. Plantain moths are likely to be one of two very similar month species.
2. Moths are small and less than 20 mm across.
3. Mainly affects crops from their second year on.
4. Caterpillars leave distinctive holes in the leaf margin. Can rapidly annihilate crops
5. Spraying is the only effective control measure.

Plantain moth (*Scopula sp*)

- A collection of native New Zealand moths, belonging to the carpet moth group. Feeds on a wide range of plants including plantain.
- Its recent appearance in large numbers in plantain crops has given rise to the name Plantain moth.
- Moths will fly up from the crop just in front of people, sometimes in very large numbers.
- Moths are small, less than 20 mm wide (about the size of a thumb nail), light brown with darker spots and a distinct darker brown band towards the end on the wings. See photo on following page.
- Caterpillars are brown, less than 20 mm long and difficult to find. They are loopers which raise part of their body off the ground or leaf as they move.
- You will seldom find the caterpillars on leaves, look for them on the ground under the plant during day.
- Caterpillar damage is usually towards the margin or edge of the leaves, leaving distinctive notches or holes (slug damage is towards the middle of the leaf).
- If there are moths in a plantain stand, caterpillars have already been there. The growth stages are:

  adult (moth) – egg – larvae (caterpillar) – pupa – adult (moth)
- Insecticide control is only possible at the caterpillar stage.
- There are no label recommendations for control of plantain moth caterpillars. However they can be controlled by broad spectrum insecticides design to control feeding caterpillars and other chewing insects e.g. cyan-traniliprole, lambda-cyhalothrin, and diazinon. Speak to your chemical represenative for local recommendations.
- The biology of the moth is not well understood. However it appears to require warm conditions (Manawatu northwards) to enable population levels to build to numbers that cause significant damage to plantain stands.

This factsheet is one in a series available at www.nzforagesystems.co..nz and published by On-Farm Research, PO Box 1142, Hastings, NZ.

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Months when plantain moth is likely to be a problem

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Newly sown												
Established plants												

Control options

Active ingredient	Trade names	Label recommendation for pasture	Withholding period	Notes
Chlorpyrifos	Chlorpyrifos 100 EC, Lorsban 50 EC, SusCon Green	No	Yes	Controls caterpillars only
Cyan-Traniliprole	Exirel	No	Yes (28 days)	Reported effective
Diazinon	Dew 500, Diazinon 800, Diazinon 800 EC	No	No	Controls caterpillars only
Diflubenzuron	Diffuse 25WP, Dimilin 25W, Porinex, Sniper, Dimilin 2L	No	Yes	Can be mixed with most knockdown insecticides for extended control
Lambda-cyhalothrin	Kaiso	No	Yes (14 days)	Reported effective—controls caterpillars

Plantain moth damage

Plantain leaf eaten by plantain moth caterpillar. Damage is on the leaf edges and not in the centre of the leaf.

(Large holes in the centre of the leaf indicate slug damage, not plantain moth damage)

Carpet moth — small and brown

Plantain moth caterpillar on soil under plant