

KITUL PALM (CARYOTA URENS) AND THE RED WEEVIL PEST—A RARITY

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In Sri Lanka, Red Weevil is a dangerous pest of coconut. It has also been recorded from some other palms, notably Kitul (*Caryota urens*) and palmyrah (*Borassus flabellifera*).

The Red Weevil grubs, being voracious feeders of soft coconut tissue, tunnel the entire trunk and the palm succumbs to the damage.

Kitul is yet another economically important palm which grows in a wild state in the Wet Zone and occasionally in the intermediate zone. Its stature is similar to coconut. The inner tissues are soft and sweet.

Kitul has been observed to be a natural host of red weevil pest. It can complete one or two generations, depending upon the size of the palm.

When kitul palms are tapped, the aroma of the toddy and the injuries in parts of the crown attract the Red Weevil adults, and females lay eggs in injured portions. On hatching, the tiny larvae burrow through and damage the entire

palm. Kitul palms are normally cut down for timber and the felled palms are left unattended for sometime. The fermenting sap of both the trunk and the stump attract red weevils. The most accommodating feature of this palm is the soft and powdery texture of the inner tissues and the hardy outerbark. This hardy bark prevents early rotting of the inner tissues.

We have observed a Kitul trunk harbouring the pest for nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ months. It appears that Kitul is a better host of Red Weevil than coconut.

In order to keep kitul palms free of this pest and also to avoid it being a host of Red Weevil, it is necessary that:

- i. When kitul palms are tapped, the crowns should be free from mechanical injuries.
- ii. Injuries are treated, as in coconut. . .
- iii. The fallen kitul palms are sawn without delay.
- iv. The stumps are destroyed.