Banana flower thrips

Thrips hawaiiensis

(General information)

Occurrence & Seasonality

Banana flower thrips are common in the flowers and among the fingers of newly emerged hands. This pest is found anywhere bananas are grown but its damage is more significant in warm dry conditions, such as in South East Queensland and northern New South Wales. Flower thrips are active throughout the year, with increased activity in January through to April. However, as long as flowers are present they can continuously breed.

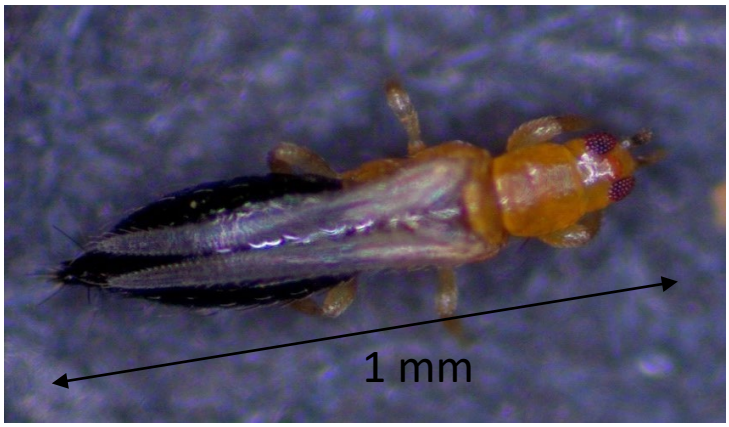

Figure 1 Adult female flower thrips

Description and life cycle

Female flower thrips cause the most damage (Figure 1). They are 1mm long with a pale brown head and thorax and have a black abdomen. They are generally found sheltering under the bracts or inside the flowers. Male flower thrips are smaller (about 0.7mm long), uniformly cream coloured and tend to occur on the outer surface of the bracts.

Adults and nymphs are found on newly emerged bunches and invade the fruit early when the bunch is still covered by its bracts.

Recent work has found that flower thrips are present very early in bunch development, inside the bell whilst it is still upright.

Flower thrips breed all year round if flowers are present and migrate progressively down the bunch as bracts lift. The life cycle takes about three weeks in summer, with full development from the egg to the adult taking place on the bunch or in other parts of the plant (Figure 2).

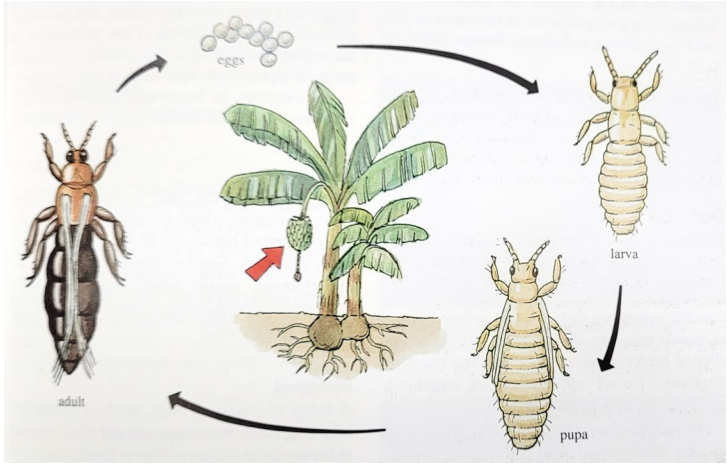

Figure 2 Life cycle of banana flower thrips (arrow indicates part(s) of plant affected)

This information is adapted from: Pinese, B., Piper, R 1994, *Bananas insect and mite management*, Department of Primary Industries Queensland

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Damage

Damage to fruit is the result of superficial scarring caused by feeding and ovipositing (egg laying). Oviposition damage resembles minute raised pimples on the sking of young immature fruit (Figures 3, 4 & 5). These have a dark raised centre and can be confirmed by lightly touching the raised area with the fingertips.

Extensive feeding damage causes a ‘corky scab’, a slightly raised grey corky skin covering (Figure 6). This damage is usually confined to the lower hands (flower thrips damage increases on lower hands as populations increase as they move down the bunch, if it is untreated). Usually, it is first noticeable on the outer whirl, where the neck meets the cushion, but can extend to the outer curve of the fruit.

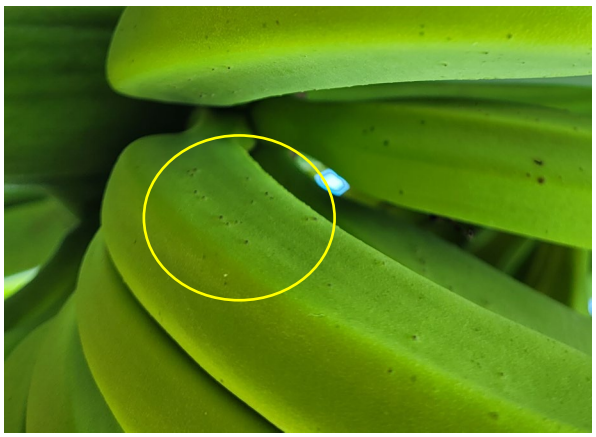

Figure 3 Egg laying (oviposition) damage on fingers. Damage resembles minute raised pimples with dark raised centres.

Figure 4 Close-up of egg laying (oviposition) damage on fingers.

Figure 5 Close-up of egg laying (oviposition) damage on fingers. Raised pimple like appearance are tactile to the touch.

Figure 5 Extensive feeding of flower thrips causes ‘corky scab’ damage

For more information contact:
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