



Pacific Pests, Pathogens & Weeds - Mini Fact Sheet Edition

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Rice pink stem borer (409)



Photo 1. Adult pink stem borer, *Sesamia inferens* (underside)



Photo 1. Adult pink stem borer, *Sesamia inferens* (top).



Photo 3. Damage ('deadheart') to rice stem by *Chilo auricilius* (damage by *Sesamia inferens* is similar).



Photo 4. 'Whitehead' - a symptom caused by stem borers: the base of the panicle is damaged preventing it from emerging or, if already emerged, the grain is unfilled and white.

Summary

- Restricted. South and Southeast Asia, North America (Hawaii), Oceania. In Guam, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands.
- Minor pest of rice, attacks usually late and only if maize or sugarcane nearby. Also pest of millet, wheat, many grasses, some sedges.
- Larvae tunnel through internodes of stem to the growing point, killing it; stems pull out easily ('deadhearts'). Panicles fail to emerge, or emerge with unfilled grain ('whiteheads').
- Eggs (up to 100) between leaf sheaths and stem, in rows. Mature larvae deep pink with orange-red heads, 25-30 mm long. Adults have brown hairs over the head and thorax, light-brown forewings, whitish hindwings, 28-35 mm wingspans. Strong flyer. Nocturnal.
- Natural enemies: many egg and larval parasitoids and predators.
- Biosecurity: introduction possible on produce contaminated with infested stems of host plants.
- Cultural control: handpick in nursery; plough land well (burying larvae/pupae of previous crop); plant at higher density than normal; rotate, e.g., legumes; synchronise plantings with neighbours; submerge eggs by raising water occasionally; weed; apply split applications N; harvest at ground level to remove larvae; plough in stubble, unharvested plants and weeds; use resistant (short, high tillering, early maturing) varieties.
- Chemical control: unlikely to be needed. Use abamectin. Avoid broad-spectrum insecticides to preserve natural enemies.

Common Name

Pink stem borer; also known as the Asiatic pink stem borer or the purple stem borer.

Scientific Name

Sesamia inferens. A moth in the Noctuidae.

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Information (and Photo 4) from Rice Knowledge Bank. IRRI. (<http://www.knowledgebank.irri.org/training/fact-sheets/pest-management/insects/item/stem-borer>); and CABI *Scirpogaga nivella* (2019) Crop Protection Compendium. (www.cabi.org/cpc); and Walker, K (2005) Asiatic pink stem borer (*Sesamia inferens*). PaDIL - (<http://www.padil.gov.au>); and from Pathak MD, Khan ZR (1994) Insect Pests of Rice. IRRI/CIPE. Photos 1&2 Pest and Diseases Image Library, Bugwood.org. Photo 3 Anderson S, Tran-Nguyen L (2012) Gold-fringed Rice Borer (*Chilo auricilius*). (Source: N. Sallam DAFF Biosecurity.) PaDIL - (<http://www.padil.gov.au>).

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