

# Pacific Pests, Pathogens, Weeds & Pesticides - Online edition

## Taro cluster caterpillar (031)

### Summary

- Widespread distribution. Tropics of Asia, Oceania. On cabbages, tomato, okra, chilli, cassava, maize, sweetpotato, rice, eggplant, watercress, and more. An important pest.
- Egg masses on either side of the leaves. Young caterpillars strip the leaf surface; older ones eat the leaves including the leaf stalks. Mostly feeding at night.
- The moth is a strong flyer.
- Cultural control: check for egg masses regularly, and destroy them by hand; allow chicken in the field.
- Natural enemies: predators and parasitoid wasps. Effective unless disturbed by cyclones or droughts.
- Chemical control: PDPs - neem, derris, pyrethrum or chilli; spinosad or Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) on young caterpillars. Alternatively, use synthetic pyrethroids, but they are likely to kill natural enemies.

### Common Name

Taro cluster caterpillar, taro armyworm, tobacco cutworm, tropical armyworm

### Scientific Name

*Spodoptera litura*. It is a member of the Noctuidae.



Photo 1. Egg mass and young caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* eating the underside of taro leaf.



Photo 2. As the caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* enlarge they eat deeper into the taro leaf; in this photo they have eaten the top surface of the leaf.



Photo 4. Mature caterpillar of *Spodoptera litura*.



Photo 3. Caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* have eaten through the leaf of *Alocasia macrorrhizos*, from the under surface, leaving the top waxy layer.



Photo 5. *Spodoptera litura* caterpillar damage on banana. The damage has occurred when the leaf was still rolled when the caterpillar chewed through several layers of the leaf.



Photo 6. Caterpillar of *Spodoptera litura* making holes in a banana leaf.



Photo 7. Adult *Spodoptera litura*.



Photo 8. *Spodoptera litura* on capsicum, under protected cropping.



Photo 9. *Spodoptera litura* caterpillars on *Basella* species under protected cropping.



Photo 10. *Spodoptera litura* damage on *Basella* species under protected cropping.

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Information from Carmichael A, et al. (2008) TaroPest: an illustrated guide to pests and diseases of taro in the South Pacific. ACIAR Monograph No. 132, 76 pp. (<https://lrd.spc.int/about-lrd/lrd-project-partners/taropest>); and (with Photo 5) from Carmichael A (2008) Cluster Caterpillar (*Spodoptera litura*). PaDIL - <http://www.padil.gov.au>. Photo 2 Kumar S, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Photos 5,6,8-10 Mani Mua, SPC, Sigatoka Research Station, Fiji.

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