

Pest Alert

Plant Protection and Quarantine

July 2007

Red Palm Mite, *Raoiella indica* Hirst

What Is It?

The red palm mite (RPM), an invasive pest of coconut palms and banana plants, arrived in the Caribbean in 2004. By 2006, the pest had spread to at least nine islands, including Puerto Rico. If it became established in the United States, the RPM would pose a significant threat to the Nation's ornamental palm, coconut, and banana industries. Travelers returning to the continental United States from the Caribbean with palm-leaf hats and handicrafts risk transporting this menacing pest to the mainland.

Palm leaf handicrafts, including baskets, rugs, mats, flowers, hats, etc., in passenger baggage are prohibited by U.S. regulations, (except those crafts that are bleached, dyed, painted, or shellacked). Do not bring your palm-leaf handicrafts to the United States. Please enjoy them while onboard the ship and dispose of them properly before disembarking.

RPM Facts

- Although the mite poses no health risk to humans, it is a serious pest of economic significance.
- The mite thrives on the undersurface of leaves. In high numbers, mites cause yellowing of the leaves followed by death of plant tissue.



- The mite is transforming the Caribbean's lush, tropical landscape into areas with yellow, sickly palms and bananas.
- Palms are a major agricultural product in Florida. Grower sales reached \$220 million in 2005.
- Crop production losses associated with the RPM could be economically significant if the mite becomes established here.
- The RPM contributed to a reduction in coconut palm production in Trinidad.
- The most efficient mode of introducing RPMs into new parts of the world is through the movement of infested plant material by humans.

Natural wind currents may also move RPMs into new areas.

- Woven palm hats, tote bags, and handicrafts made from palm leaves are a proven carrier of the RPM into new ports-of-call.

For More Information

To learn more about how you can help keep the RPM out of the United States, please visit http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/red_palm_mite/.

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Photo credits: The scanning electron microscope shot of the RPM was taken in black and white by Eric Erbe and colorized by Chris Pooley. Both are employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. The image of woven palm-leaf baskets was taken by Mike Meadows of the Florida Division of Plant Industry and is reproduced by permission.

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