TREE PEST OF THE MARIANAS

Adult moth showing normally concealed hind wings

Feeding damage in starfruit.
Note original feeding hole in center of damaged area

Photos by Donald Nafus

Common Name: Fruit-piercing moth
Scientific Name: *Eudocima* (*Othreis*) *fullonia* (Clerck) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae)

Biology: Eggs of this moth are laid on *Erythrina* trees (coral trees). The caterpillars feed on the *Erythrina* leaves. This insect is principally a pest in the adult stage. It feeds primarily at night on a wide variety of ripening fruit by piercing the fruit and sucking out the juices. Moth populations are generally higher during the rainy season. Large populations of moths occur periodically following droughts.

Damage: A round, pinhole-sized puncture is made in fruits. The hole serves as an entry point for disease organisms and can result in early fruit drop. A small cavity is left in the fruit in the feeding site. The fruit around the cavity will be dry and spongy.

Crops affected: The moth feeds on a wide variety of fruits including citrus, guava, mango, papaya, pomegranate, eggplant and tomato.

Distribution: The moth occurs in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia and the South Pacific. It is present throughout Micronesia including the Marianas.

Control: This moth is difficult to control with insecticides because the moths spend only a short time on the fruit, do not breed on the affected crops and are strong fliers. The fruit can be protected by covering it with bags shortly before it ripens. Area-wide destruction of *Erythrina* could reduce the moth populations but is not likely to be practical. Fruit-piercing moths are repelled by strong lights. Kerosene pressure lamps may be used if electricity is not available, and lights should be placed at a height of 5 feet at 40-70 foot intervals downwind of plants to be protected.

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