

# A New Pest of the African Oil Palm in the Neotropics: *Periphoba hircia* (Lepidoptera Saturniidae Hemileucinae)

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Five species of Saturniidae Hemileucinae cause defoliation of the African oil palm, *Elaeis guineensis* Jacquin, in the Neotropics (Genty et al. 1978). According to Lemaire (pers. comm.) these include: *Automeris liberia* (Cramer, 1780), *A. cinctistiga* (R. Felder & Rogenhofer, 1875), *A. bilinea* (Walker, 1855), *A. sp.* and *Pseudodirphia gregatus* (Bouvier, 1924).

Damage caused by these caterpillars can become important. One individual destroys 400 to 1,000 cm<sup>2</sup> of leaf, i.e., 2 to 4 pinnae; the critical threshold is 50 to 100 caterpillars per palm (Genty et al. 1978). Caterpillars of Hemileucinae have been considered polyphagous by Janzen (1984).

On October 1991 we found caterpillars of *Periphoba hircia* eating leaves of *Elaeis guineensis* in an 8 year old, 500 ha plantation located in Peruvian Amazonia, Department of Loreto, Province of Maynas, in the lower Maniti River valley, near Papero village, 3°24'S, 72°45'W. Elevation is 125 m above sea level. The surrounding vegetation is tropical rain forest. Average annual rainfall is 2.3 m with a peak in February and the driest period in August.

The biology of *Periphoba hircia* was studied by Gardiner (1967). Up to 200 eggs are laid by a female (Fig. 1) in captivity. Incubation period is 53 days at 20-25° C. Caterpillars are gregarious and pro-

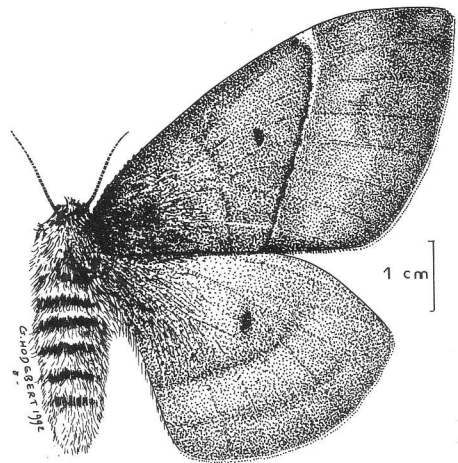
cessionary. Pupation period varies from 40 to 50 days in Peruvian Amazonia.

In the Maniti River valley we also found caterpillars of *Automeris liberia* causing damage to the palms.

*Periphoba hircia* is a new "pest of medium consequence which could become dangerous" as concluded by Genty et al. (1978) for the other five Saturniidae previously reported on *Elaeis guineensis* in the Neotropics.

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1. Female of *Periphoba hircia*.

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