

First record of *Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae: Heliiothinae) on cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*) in Brazil

Primer registro de *Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae: Heliiothinae) en uchuva en Brasil



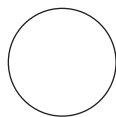
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Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa

Photo: A.P.C. de Melo

ABSTRACT

Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa (Guenée) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae: Heliiothinae) is a frugivorous and monophagous species with plant hosts in the genus *Physalis*. In the last few years, the subflexus straw moth became the main pest-insect in tomatillo crops (*Physalis ixocarpa* Brotero) in Mexico and cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana* L.) crops in Argentina. The objective was to provide the first record of *C. subflexa* on *P. peruviana* in Brazil. The specimens were collected in the larval stage and kept on a natural diet until reaching the adult stage. Species identification was carried out based on morphological criteria. Damage from *C. subflexa* on *P. peruviana* fruits cultivated in an organic system were recorded. This is the first record in Brazil.



Additional key words: exotic fruit, subflexus straw moth, organic system.

RESUMEN

Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa (Guenée) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae: Heliiothinae) es una especie frugívora y monófoga con hospederos que consta de las plantas del género *Physalis*. En los últimos años, gusano del tomate

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de cascara se convirtió en la principal plagas-insectos en cultivos de tomatillo (*Physalis ixocarpa* Brotero de México) y cultivo de la uchuva (*Physalis peruviana* L.) en Argentina. El objetivo fue reportar el primer registro de *C. subflexa* en *P. peruviana* en Brasil. Los especímenes se recogieron en la fase larvaria y se mantuvieron en una dieta natural hasta llegar a la etapa adulta. La identificación de especies se realizó en base a criterios morfológicos. Se registraron la presencia y daños causados por *C. subflexa* en frutos de *P. peruviana*, producidos en un sistema orgánico. Este es el primer registro para Brasil.

Palabras clave adicionales: fruta exótica, gusano del tomate de cáscara, sistema orgánico.

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INTRODUCTION

The subflexus straw moth, scientifically named *Chloridea (Heliiothis) subflexa* (Guenée) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae: Heliiothinae), is native to North America (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Pogue, 2013). It occurs in tropical and subtropical regions of the American continents in the following countries: United States, Canada, Mexico, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil (Heath *et al.*, 1990; Poole *et al.*, 1993; Bado *et al.*, 2005; Groot *et al.*, 2007; Groot *et al.*, 2009; Pogue, 2013; De Souza *et al.*, 2015). The areas of occurrence in Brazil include the Amazon, Northeastern region (Pernambuco, Paraíba), Southeastern (Rio de Janeiro) and Midwestern regions (Mato Grosso do Sul; Goiás) (Poole *et al.*, 1993; De Souza *et al.*, 2015).

Chloridea subflexa is a frugivorous and monophagous species with plant hosts in the genus *Physalis* (Oppenheim and Gould, 2002 a; Benda *et al.*, 2011). Until now, the principal interest in this species consisted of studies on hybridization under laboratory conditions using *C. virescens*, naturally reducing population sizes of this pest-insect by inducing sterility of the males (Mitchell and Heath, 1987). However, in the last few years, the subflexus straw moth became the main pest-insect in tomatillo crops (*Physalis ixocarpa* Brotero) in Mexico (Groot *et al.*, 2007; Pogue, 2013; Bautista-Martínez *et al.*, 2015) and cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana* L.) crops in Argentina (Bado *et al.*, 2005).

Therefore, the objective was to provide the first record of damage from *C. subflexa* on *P. peruviana* in Brazil.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The observations were made on an organic cape gooseberry plantation in Hidrolândia (16°57'51.79" S and 49°11'02.09" W; 865 m altitude) - west central region of Brazil, from 2014 to 2015. Damaged fruit with the presence of larvae in different instars was observed in 100 plants each year (Fig. 1).

The specimens were collected in the larval stage and kept on a natural diet until reaching the adult stage (Fig. 2). Species identification was carried out based on morphological criteria (head, thorax, forewing, male and female genitalia) (Poole *et al.*, 1993). The identification was performed by the entomologist Vitor Osmar Becker (Serra Bonita Reserve). The adult individuals were stored at the Insectarium of the School of Agronomy of the Federal University of Goiás, Brazil.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fruits were not harvested in the two years of cape gooseberry cultivation because of the attack from *C. subflexa*. The plants flourished in a period similar to that reported in the Southeastern region (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2013) and earlier than the Southern region (Bentemps *et al.*, 2014). Flowering took place 35 days after transplanting in 2014 (01/07/2014), and, earlier, 25 days after transplanting in 2015 (25/05/2015).

The moths have a shiny body and green-olive spots in the abdomen and wings (Pogue, 2013). There are medial lines preceded by light brown (cream color),



Figure 1. Larvae of *Chloridea (Heliothis) subflexa* in *Physalis peruviana* fruit.



Figure 2. *Chloridea (Heliothis) subflexa* eggs (A), pupae (B) and adults (C), found on *Physalis peruviana*.

specifically in the wings where the basal region has a lighter color than the medial region (Poole *et al.*, 1993). The key traits in distinguishing *C. subflexa* from *C. virescens* are related to the prothoracic tibia and palps (Poole *et al.*, 1993).

Oviposition is more frequent in vegetative (stem and leaves) than in reproductive structures (bud, flowers, fruit) (Benda *et al.*, 2011). The vegetative areas are

preferred because of the higher surface area. It is noteworthy that oviposition may also occur in non-host plants from different genera, such as: *Digitaria*, *Cyperus*, *Gossipium* and *Tagetes* (Benda *et al.*, 2011).

Newly emerged larvae infiltrate the calyx, where *Physalis* berries may be found, and begin feeding. The larvae feed on the mesocarp of the fruit. This damage may occur superficially or the larvae may consume the entire mesocarp, leaving only the epicarp of the fruit. The aforementioned damage pattern is common to larvae in more advanced instars. In addition, damage is more common in green fruit than in ripe ones (characterized by the yellowish or orange color of the epicarp).

Feeding is usually restricted to fruit of the same plant, where at least three berries are necessary for the larvae become pupae (Benda *et al.*, 2009). The damage hinders *in natura* consumption and industrial use of *Physalis* fruit.

The calyx provides an enclosure for the larvae, creating a structural refuge that reduces its detection by parasitoids and predators (Baumann and Meier, 1993; Sisterson and Gould, 1999; Oppenheim and Gould, 2002a). This structure acts as a mechanical barrier and has withanolides and glycosides that are feed deterrents (Baumann and Meier, 1993; Dinan *et al.*, 1997) for other phytophagous insects.

The only parasitoid associated with *C. subflexa* in the United States is *Cardiochiles nigreiceps* Vierick (Hymenoptera: Braconidae). The rates of parasitism are very low (1 to 4%) (Sisterson and Gould, 1999; Oppenheim and Gould, 2002a; Oppenheim and Gould, 2002b) and are not only related to the presence of the calyx.

De Moraes and Mescher (2004) reported that regurgitations of *C. subflexa* do not have volicitin. Volicitin is a key substance in inducing the responses of the plant to herbivory (via volatile compounds) and its absence is associated with the lack of linoleic acid in *Physalis* fruit. Linoleic acid is key for normal development and insect metamorphosis, especially for the order Hymenoptera (e.g., *C. nigreiceps*) (De Moraes and Mescher, 2004). Thus, *C. subflexa* has the ability to grow in fruit that are not nutritionally suitable for other insects and, as a consequence, it is an improper host for natural enemies (De Moraes and Mescher, 2004).

Some *Physalis* species have defense mechanisms against attacks from *C. subflexa*. These can be related to mechanical damage such as fruit abscission in *P.*

angulata and *P. pubescens* (Petzold *et al.*, 2009) or egg desiccation in *P. angulata* as a consequence of the release of chemical substances (Petzold *et al.*, 2009; Petzold-Maxwell *et al.*, 2011).

This high degree of specialization of *C. subflexa* for *Physalis* plants (Barthel *et al.*, 2016) hinders the implementation of management strategies in commercial areas, especially in the case of tomatillo and cape gooseberry. Groot *et al.* (2007) suggested that monitoring with traps using pheromones is a key strategy for integrated *C. subflexa* management programs. It is noteworthy that chemical management must be focused on the adult insect once the caterpillars are protected by the calyx in the larval stage. In organic systems, the removal of other *Physalis* species is recommended, such as the angular winter cherry (*P. angulata*), along with cultivation in a protected environment in areas of high infestation.

We reiterate that cape gooseberry cultivation is expanding in Brazil, especially in the southern (Lima *et al.*, 2009; Muniz *et al.*, 2011; Betemps *et al.*, 2014) and southeastern regions (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2012). Brazilian production does not meet domestic demand, so importation from Colombia, the largest world producer, becomes necessary (Muniz *et al.*, 2014). The fruits are eaten raw or processed (via juices, jellies, dehydrated) (Puente *et al.*, 2011). The berries stand out because of their exotic taste and high mineral content, antioxidants, and medicinal and bioactive substances (Puente *et al.*, 2011; Ramadan, 2012; Rop *et al.*, 2012; Rutz *et al.*, 2012; Namiesnik *et al.*, 2013; Bravo *et al.*, 2014; Fischer *et al.*, 2014; Moneim *et al.*, 2014; Al-Olayan *et al.*, 2014; Ahmed, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The occurrence of *Chloridea (Heliothis) subflexa* in *Physalis peruviana* production areas can derail organic production because of the damage that is caused. Therefore, studies related to the biology and ecology of this insect, its host and the natural control agent are needed to support strategies for integrated management under the Brazilian conditions.

Conflict of interests: the manuscript was prepared and reviewed with the participation of the authors, who declare that there exists no conflict of interest that puts in risk the validity of the presented results.

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