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Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Biological Control

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<https://github.com/aubreymoore/FB17-Final-Report/raw/master/report.pdf>

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1. Background

The major goal of this project is to find an effective biological control agent for coconut rhinoceros beetle biotype G (CRB-G).

Prior to arrival of CRB-G on Guam during 2007, coconut rhinoceros beetle infestations of Pacific islands were readily controlled by classical biological control using *Oryctes* nudiviruses (OrNV). Following a lack of response to release of OrNV on Guam, research showed that the Guam CRB population is a genetically distinct virus-resistant biotype which has become known as CRB-G [2]. This biotype is highly invasive and is causing massive damage to coconut and oil palms in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. CRB-G has also invaded Oahu and Rota. Eradication attempts have been launched on these two islands.

Additional goals for this project are to establish a CRB damage survey to evaluate efficacy of biocontrol and other tactics, and to maintain and facilitate collaboration with other Pacific island entomologists working to find solutions for CRB-G management.

2. Staffing

Staff for this project currently comprises of only 2 people: the PI, Dr. Aubrey Moore, and a post-doc, Dr. James Grasela.

- Dr. James Grasela, an insect pathologist, has been hired for a term of 2 years with a grant from Department of Interior, Office of Island Affairs.
- Ian Iriarte, a graduate student working on this project, resigned to accept a permanent job. Search for a replacement is under way.

3. Bioassays to Detect Candidate Biocontrol Agents for CRB-G

3.1. Bioassay Results

We have not yet found an OrNV isolate which shows promise as a biological control agent. Recent bioassay results are attached in Appendix A.

During laboratory bioassays, we dose CRB-G with samples of OrNV isolates, and observe mortality and changes in mass for one month. Each beetle is kept in isolation and individual records are stored in a laboratory information system (Section 3.3).

3.2. CRB Rearing

Currently, experimental beetles are field-collected on Guam as prepupae, pupae or adults from breeding sites or as adults from pheromone traps. Each beetle is given a serial number and is reared individually in a Mason jar stored in one of three environmental chambers set for 30 degrees Celsius, 80% relative humidity and 12 hour photoperiod. Adult beetles are feed weekly with a slice of banana.

3.3. Laboratory Information Management System

We have developed an online database which we are using as a laboratory information management system for maintaining individual records for our experiment beetles in our rearing program [5]. This system was developed using the [web2py python web framework](#) and it is available on the web at <http://aubreymoore.pythonanywhere.com/rearing>.

3.4. Acquisition of an OrNV isolate from Taiwan

During May 2019, Moore made a trip to Taiwan to receive 80 adult coconut rhinoceros beetles collected by Dr. Frank Hsu of the Taiwan Normal University. The Taiwan population is of special interest because specimens in a previous collection were all determined to be CRB-G and 82% of these tested positive for OrNV [15].

Preliminary bioassays of virus isolated from this collection did not result in significant mortality. Beetle specimens and virus samples have been sent to AgResearch New Zealand for molecular analysis.

3.5. Acquisition of a Virus-Susceptible CRB Biotype for Comparative Bioassays

Since discovery of the CRB-G biotype on Guam [2], we have been operating under the hypothesis that this biotype is significantly more tolerant (resistant) to pathogenic effects of OrNV isolates previously used as effective biocontrol agents for CRB invading Pacific Islands. It has also been hypothesized that CRB-G has different behavioral characteristics, such as a significantly reduced attraction to oryctalure. However, comparative laboratory bioassays have not been performed to test these hypotheses.

We applied for and have been granted a USDA-APHIS import permit for live CRB which will allow us to establish a laboratory colony of CRB from presumed non-virus-resistant populations (See [3] and [14]).

We plan to import CRB from American Samoa and have already provide our collaborator, Dr. Mark Schmaedick at American Samoa Community College, with secure shipping containers we designed to facilitate secure transport of live CRB [13].

3.6. Laboratory Improvements

Our current lack of molecular technology for detecting or quantifying OrNV is a major impediment to performing and interpreting bioassays. We have ordered laboratory equipment and supplies to remove this impediment.

4. CRB Damage Survey

The objective of this component of the project is to develop an automated system to evaluate CRB damage by image analysis of roadside video surveys. We have completed a *proof of concept* trial in which we used deep learning to train an object detector which locates and counts dead and CRB-damaged coconut palms in video streams. Visual results are presented in a YouTube post [10] and technical details are available in an Open Science Framework Project [8].

5. Presentations and Outreach

- During Fall Term 2018, we did monthly presentations on coconut rhinoceros beetles and other insects for the Guam Head Start Program.
- An oral presentation was made at the joint annual meetings of the Entomological Society of America and the Canadian Entomological Society, Vancouver:

Aubrey Moore. “Failed Attempts to Establish IPM for Asian Cycad Scale and Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle on Guam”. Nov. 13, 2018. URL: <https://zenodo.org/record/2545065/files/Moore-Vancouver-2018.pdf> (visited on 01/21/2019)

- An oral presentation and guided field work session was put together for the University of Guam Extension Internship Program:

Aubrey Moore. *Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Causes an Ecological Catastrophe on Guam*. June 21, 2019. URL: <https://github.com/aubreymoore/2019-Extension-Internship-CRB-Presentation/raw/master/2019-CRB-catastrophy-presentation.pdf>

6. Regional Collaboration

An informal collaboration has been formed among Pacific-based entomologists working on the CRB-G problem. Scientists from Guam, Hawaii, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Malaysia, Japan and New Zealand have met several times and future meetings are planned:

- 2015 Pacific Entomology Conference, Honolulu, HI, USA
- 2016 International Congress of Entomology, Orlando, USA
- 2017 Japanese Society for Insect Pathology, Tokyo, Japan
- 2018 Society for Invertebrate Pathology, Gold Coast, Australia
- 2019 XIX International Plant Protection Congress (IPPC2019), India
- 2020 (tentative): Pacific Plant Protection Organization, Guam

Although individual institutions involved in finding a solution to the CRB-G problem have secured funding from multiple, short-term grants, we have been unsuccessful in finding funding to support a well-coordinated regional project. To facilitate informal communication and cooperation among members of the current *ad hoc* group, we have spent some time and resources on developing the following resources.

6.1. Wiki Site

During 2018, we built a private wiki intended to facilitate sharing technical information among those working to control CRB-G [6]. It is hoped that this site will be built and maintained by a community of users (ala Wikipedia).

6.2. Facebook Site

As an alternative to the wiki, we are launching a controlled-access Facebook site [12].

6.3. CRB Bibliography

This bibliography contains over 330 scientific journal articles, technical reports, and presentations about coconut rhinoceros beetle. A copy is provided in Appendix B.

6.4. Online CRB Invasion History Map

Spread of CRB and CRB-G in the Pacific is being documented using an online, interactive map maintained by Moore [\[9\]](#). Recent potential geographical expansions include CRB (not the CRB-G biotype) in Vanuata, interception of CRB-G in New Caledonia, and discovery of a single CRB-? adult on Aguiguan Island, a small island near Tinian in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

7. References

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- [2] Sean D. G. Marshall, Aubrey Moore, Maclean Vaqalo, Alasdair Noble, and Trevor A. Jackson. “A New Haplotype of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, *Oryctes Rhinoceros*, Has Escaped Biological Control by *Oryctes Rhinoceros* Nudivirus and Is Invading Pacific Islands”. In: *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* 149 (Oct. 1, 2017), pp. 127–134. ISSN: 0022-2011. DOI: [10.1016/j.jip.2017.07.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jip.2017.07.006). URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022201117300289> (visited on 08/26/2017).
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- [12] Aubrey Moore and Ian R. Iriarte. *FaceBook Site: CRB-G*. Oct. 13, 2019. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/crbg07/>.
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- [15] Shizu Watanabe and Michael Melzer. “Survey for Oryctes Rhinoceros Nudivirus (OrNV) in a Hawaiian coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (Oryctes Rhinoceros) Population and genetic Diversity of Pacific isolates of OrNV”. 2016. URL: http://www.sipweb.org/docs/Abstract_book_SIP_2016.pdf (visited on 07/31/2018).

Appendices

A. Recent Bioassay Results

James Grasela. *Progress in Bioassays of OrNV Isolates to Detect Biocontrol Candidates for CRB-G*. University of Guam, Sept. 29, 2019, p. 2. URL: <https://github.com/aubreymoore/FB18-Report-2/raw/master/Grasela-September%202019%20Progress%20Report.pdf>

B. Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Bibliography

Aubrey Moore and James Grasela. *Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Bibliography*. 2019. URL: <https://www.overleaf.com/project/5d92e50a61cab30001783d1a>