

rinted from **THE TIMES OF INDIA**

CPCRI steps in double quick to avert escalation of leaf eating caterpillar

TNN | Feb 1, 2017, 04.24 PM IST



MANGALURU: Underscoring the gravity of outbreak of coconut black headed leaf eating caterpillar in parts of Dakshina Kannada and Kasaragod district, Kasargod based CPCRI, department of horticulture, Krishi Vigyan Kendras in Mangaluru and Kasargod and agriculture departments of Karnataka and Kerala started the process of release of parasitoids on Wednesday. A decision to this effect was taken at a joint meeting of above mentioned stakeholders at CPCRI near here on Monday.

CPCRI estimate indicates nearly 2,000 coconut palm on this side of the border in Karnataka at Thokkottu, Manchi, Mudipu and Ullal have been affected. Larvae extensively feed on chlorophyll of leaves, leaving behind galleries with fecal matter and leading to complete drying of leaves. As the pest population shoots up during summer and dry weather, there is chance of further spread of this pest if proper management strategies are not implemented at this stage.

P Chowdappa, director, CPCRI, and H R Yogish, deputy director, department of horticulture who with their scientists undertook an awareness campaign at Kalappu on the city outskirts and released parasitoids averred that the situation could come to normal within a year. The action plan entails release of 20-30 parasitoids every fortnight among a cluster of affected coconut palms for at least three months. The parasitoids feast on the black headed lead eating caterpillar.

Similar outbreaks were recorded in Padubidri in Udupi district in 2004-05, in Arsikere in

Hassan district in 2014. Hot and humid weather provide the ideal conditions for the caterpillar to thrive, noted Chowdappa. While CPCRI has bred around 25,000 parasitoids for its free distribution among farmers, horticulture department has raised 1.5-lakh parasitoids at its Thumbe lab. These biological agents will be provided to farmers at their doorsteps, Chowdappa assured.

Main reason for the farmers to ignore the issue, Chowdappa said is their assumption that the trees are drying due to lack of water, not realizing that it is in fact the caterpillars that are wreaking havoc. If the parasitoids are released periodically for next three months, they can bring the outbreak under control, he said. CPCRI, departments of agriculture and horticulture and KVKs have taken steps to display flex banners informing farmers about the problem and the cure, he said.