

## Banana Moth (*Opogona sacchari*)

**Introduced:** Found in Florida in 1963 and by the 1970s was considered a pest.

**Current Infestation:** Predominately found throughout south Florida.

**Description/Biology:** The life cycle is approximate 1½ months. Female moths lay eggs in wounds and crevices in plant tissue. Upon hatching, the young caterpillars bore into the plant, eventually producing characteristic piles



Università di Napoli Archives, Italy, www.forestryimages.org

of excrement (frass).

Older caterpillars measure from ¾ inch to just over one inch long (1.9 to 2.5 cm) and are somewhat transparent. Key

characteristics are brown patches on its top and dark brown “breathing pores” on its sides. Pupae are found inside plant tissue at the end of feeding tunnels.

Empty cocoons can be found protruding from the stems of infested plants. The

adult moths are small, about ½ inch long (1.0 to 1.5 cm), and generally dark grayish brown with a small,

black spot on the forewing. They are nocturnal, and are attracted to damaged and stressed plants.



A. van Frankenhuijzen, Plant Protection Service, Netherlands

**Seasonality:** Banana moth can be found year-round, however, higher populations can be seen during the warmer months.

**Hosts:** Bamboo, banana, pineapple, sugarcane, and ornamentals (i.e. palms, dracaenas, ti plants, yucca, etc.).

**Importance:** Not usually a pest in the landscape, however, can be a nursery pest requiring management.

**Damage:** Banana moth caterpillars generally feed on decaying plant tissue and detritus, but will burrow into and feed on living plant tissue. Feeding can occur in the petioles, stem, and roots of the host plant. Early stages of larval tunneling in plant tissue are practically undetectable.



Advanced damage includes leaves wilting and complete plant collapse. Beware that there are many causes of similar types of plant damage by other organisms or natural events. Only by dissecting the plant is diagnosis confirmed.

## Banana Moth (*Opogona sacchari*)

In bamboo palms (*Chamaedorea* spp.) the caterpillars typically feed at the plant base where the aerial roots enter the soil.



In a few cases, they have damaged landscape coconut palms in south Florida. Look for holes along the trunk with some sap bleeding (other factors can cause

the same damage). Inspect for holes in plant stems. Infested tissue will feel soft.

**Management:** To reduce banana moth damage, avoid plant stress such as over pruning, poor plant nutrition, over crowding in nurseries, over watering, drought conditions, herbicide damage, and stem and trunk wounds. Never drive nails into plants and use weed trimmers around plants with caution. If plants are known to be infested, remove and destroy the plant. Follow good sanitation practices in nurseries. Intercrop susceptible plants with plants that are not susceptible to this pest.

Homeowner and Professional - Banana moth infestations are rarely found in the landscape and, therefore, do not usually require treatment. Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) products can be effective if sprayed into the tunnels.

Grower - Management of banana moth can be very difficult because once it has been detected, damage is usually extensive and the pest is very difficult to control. A systemic insecticide will likely be necessary. Products that contain a neonicotinoid insecticide such as imidacloprid (Marathon 60WP or II) may help control this pest. Entomopathogenic nematodes such as *Steinernema carpocapsae* have been used to control this pest with varying degrees of success.

### Websites:

<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/IP-24.pdf>

[http://www.eppo.org/QUARANTINE/insects/Opogona\\_sacchari/OPOGSC\\_ds.pdf](http://www.eppo.org/QUARANTINE/insects/Opogona_sacchari/OPOGSC_ds.pdf)

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/CN010>

### Authors:

Adrian Hunsberger, UF/IFAS, Miami-Dade Extension  
Kim Gabel, UF/IFAS, Monroe Extension  
Catharine Mannion, UF/IFAS, TREC Homestead  
Eileen Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville  
Lyle Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville

Photo Credits: Università di Napoli Archives, Italy, [www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org); A. van Frankenhuijzen, Plant Protection Service, Netherlands; UF/IFAS, Rita Duncan and Adrian Hunsberger

August 2006