

TREE PEST OF THE MARIANAS

Color phases of caterpillars



Photo by Donald Nafus

Common Name: Flame tree looper

Scientific Name: *Pericyma cruegeri* (Butler) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae)

Biology: The caterpillar of this moth is a serious pest of the royal poinciana or flame tree, *Delonix regia*. The caterpillars feed on the foliage and are abundant principally in the wet season. The yellowish or bluish-green eggs are laid singly on the leaflets. The eggs hatch within 2-3 days and the larvae take about 1 month to mature. The caterpillars may be green or black and white. The caterpillars pupate on the trees in a cocoon constructed of webbing and leaves, and the moths emerge within 12 days.

Damage: The caterpillar feeds on leaflets and strips the tree of most of the foliage but does not eat the midribs. The loss of leaves results in smaller leaves, death of small branches, general loss of vigor for the trees, and poor, desynchronized flowering. Secondary infestations by bark borers and fungal diseases can also occur. The caterpillars may leave the trees and can become a nuisance if they crawl into homes or buildings.

Plants affected: This moth is a serious pest on the flame tree, *Delonix regia* and yellow poinciana, *Peltophorum pterocarpum*. It has also been found on *Desmanthus virgatus*, *Cassia fistula*, and *Leucaena leucocephala*.

Distribution: This moth is found in S.E. Asia, Australia and several Pacific islands in the tropical and subtropical zones. In Micronesia, it is found on Guam, Rota, and Belau. It was first noticed on Guam in 1971 and was reported as being in Rota by 1974.

Control: Particularly valuable trees can be protected by spraying with insecticides or with *Bacillus thuringiensis* during the rainy season. Consult with an agricultural extension agent for the latest information on recommended insecticides.

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