Severe incidence of hairy caterpillar, *Trabala vishnou* (Lefedvre) (*Lepidoptera: Lasiocampidae*) on pomegranate, *Punica granatum* L.

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Regular monitoring of pomegranate, *Punica granatum* L. (cv. Bhagwa) during 2013-14, for pest occurrence revealed severe defoliation by a hairy caterpillar *Trabala vishnou* (Lefedvre) (*Lepidoptera: Lasiocampidae*) during monsoon period in an unsprayed experimental orchard of Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Caterpillars of mixed instars were found feeding heavily on the tender foliage causing severe defoliation. Preliminary observations revealed that the infestation was observed to be severe, with 55.80% plants in the experimental orchard being infested (48 out of 86 plants) with an average defoliation of 37.5% per tree. Up to 15 larvae were observed feeding voraciously on plants. The caterpillars had long tufts of urticating hairs all over body that can cause extreme itching, skin irritation when touched (Fig. 1b). Literature reported this caterpillar, *T. vishnou* as a sporadic pest of castor. It has also been found feeding on almond, jamun, guava, pomegranate (Butani, 1976) and populus (Tewari and Namgail, 1999). Further, it has been recorded as a new pest on Himalayan cedar, *Cedrus deodara* from Himachal Pradesh during 2002 (Kalia and Pandey, 2002). Besides India, this lasiocampid moth has been reported in Oriental realm mainly from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, China and Taiwan. Further, it has been reported to feed on a wide range of host plants such as *Acacia confuse* (*Leguminosae*), *Santalum album* (*Santalaceae*), *Castanea* and *Quercus* spp. (*Fagaceae*) and *Eucalyptus globules* (*Myrtaceae*).

Eggs were creamy-white and covered with brown hairs laid either on leaves or fruit calyx (Fig 1a,b) and the incubation period varied from 8 to 10 days (Rathore and Verma, 1976). The full grown larvae measured on an average 5.06 cm in length with fine network of

![Fig. 1. Different stages of lasiocampid moth, *T. vishnou*; (a, b) Eggs laid on fruit calyx; (c) Hairy caterpillar (d) Pupa (encircled) on pomegranate shoot (e) adult female moth](image-url)
vertical/horizontal lines and up to six larval instars were reported with an average larval period of 28.3 days for both the sexes (Sevastopulo, 1939; Beeson, 1941). Pencil like dark brown hairs arising from the first somite was noticed in all instars (Fig 1c). Pupation took place on plant itself. Pupa was reddish brown and pupation took place inside a saddle like cocoon, usually cocoons were found on the petiole of leaves (Fig 1d). The colour of the cocoon was same as that of the larva. Each cocoon had two humps on dorsal side and two openings, one on each side. Male cocoons were smaller in size than the female. The total pupal period was 13 – 18 days (Rathore and Verma, 1976; Vishwanath and Visweswara Gowda, 1974).

The adult is a medium sized moth exhibiting sexual dimorphism. The male moth is greenish, whereas, the female is stouter and greenish yellow/yellow with large anal tufts (Fig 1e). Bipectinate antennae are present in both the sexes but bristles are longer in males. The adult lived for 5-6 days and up to 3 generations per year were reported (Raghunatha, 1999). Earlier report of the occurrence of the hairy caterpillar T. vishnou in considerable numbers on pomegranate in and around Bangalore was in 1998 by Mani et al., (2000). They also reported natural parasitization (up to 100%) by the tachinid Blepharipa zebina Walker and also natural pathogenesis with NPV (5%) in the field. The current observation on severe defoliation of pomegranate foliage by this lasiocampid shows that it has potential to become serious pest of pomegranate under organic cultivation where no insecticidal sprays are exercised.

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