

## Research Note

### SEVERE ATTACK ON SUGARCANE AND GRASSES BY *MOCIS LATIPES* (GUENÉE), (LEPIDOPTERA: NOCTUIDAE) IN SOUTHWEST PUERTO RICO<sup>1</sup>

A severe outbreak of *Mocis latipes* (Guenée) caterpillars occurred on sugarcane, Guinea grass (*Panicum maximum*) and Salina Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliare*) in the Lajas-Cabo Rojo-San Germán area of southwest Puerto Rico during late August through September 1972. Reports to the authors indicate the outbreak involved over 1,500 cuerdas<sup>2</sup> of sugarcane and more than 100 of grasses, mostly of the two named, during this time period.

Random counts made by the authors at the peak of infestation in a 20-cuerda field of young (about 0.6 m. tall) stands of Guinea grass averaged 70 caterpillars (30 min., 85 max.) per stool.

Outbreaks of this pest species occurred in less severity in the same area during the same season of the year in 1968, 1970, and 1971.

An analysis of weather data indicates that the time of attack coincides with the months of heaviest rainfall and with a drop in the evaporation rate. Such weather conditions occur normally after the hot summer months of June and July. High rates of infestation by this species thus appear seasonal and probably they can be anticipated or predicted.

*Mocis latipes* (Guenée) has been identified commonly as *M. repanda* (F.). Wolcott's<sup>3</sup> records and information pertaining to *repanda* most probably refer to *M. latipes*. Both names are of valid species. The true *M. repanda* should be a very rare species in Puerto Rico according to Dr. E. L. Todd, USNM, Washington, D.C., who identified our adult specimens from Cabo Rojo and San Lorenzo and furnished us the distribution of both species. *M. repanda* is fairly common in the Lesser Antilles south of St. Croix where it occurs with the more common *M. latipes*. *M. latipes* occurs from New York south to Argentina and is abundant throughout the Antilles.

The several caterpillar stages of *M. latipes* can be distinguished from other loopers attacking grasses in Puerto Rico by the presence on the dorsum of two conspicuous transverse bands between abdominal segments 1 and 2, and 2 and 3. Mature caterpillars can reach a length of 55 mm. and are recognized by the many fine light-brown stripes as well as the mentioned transverse bands (fig. 1,A). Adults are mostly purplish-

<sup>1</sup> Manuscript submitted to Editorial Board February 15, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> A cuerda is equivalent to 0.9712 acre.

<sup>3</sup> Wolcott, G. N., The insects of Puerto Rico, J. Agr. Univ. P.R. 32 (1-4): 1-975, 1948.

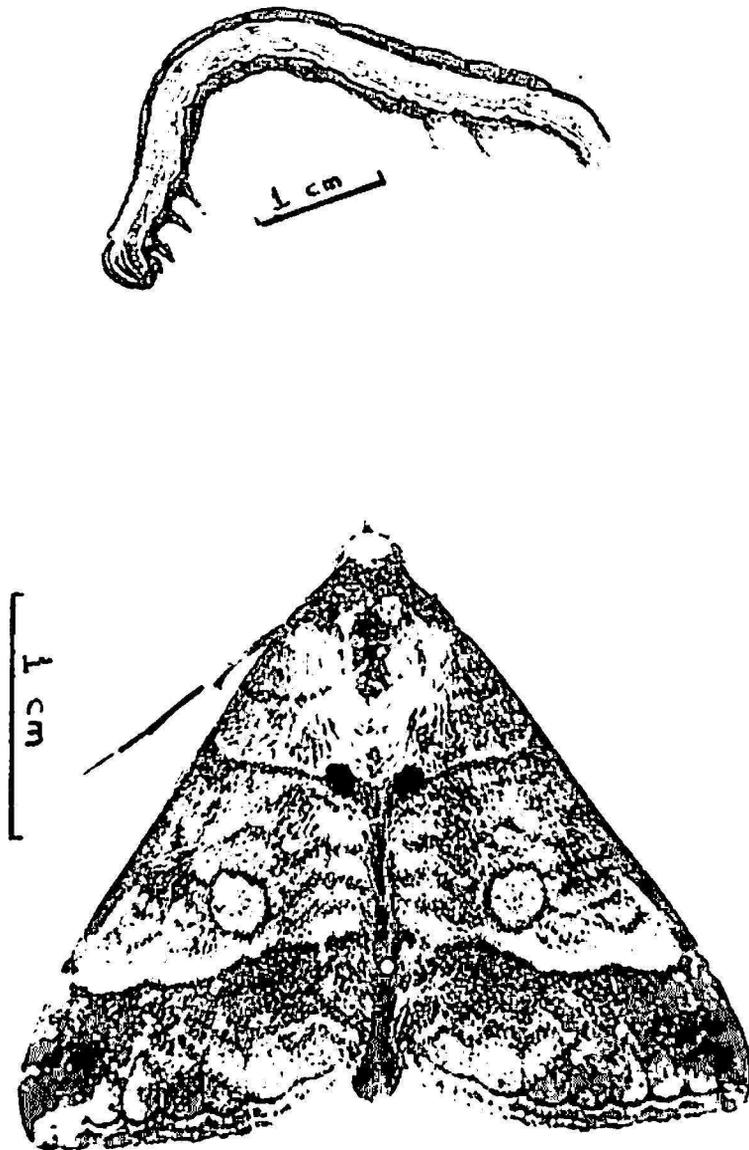


FIG. 1, A.—Mature caterpillar of *Mocis latipes* (Guenée), and 1, B, adult female of *Mocis latipes* (Guenée).

brown and have the apical third of the forewing darker (fig. 1,B). The black spots near the thorax can be smaller or missing.

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