



Bug of the week

The pink wax scale *Ceroplastes rubens* is a very common pest of many plant species in Rarotonga. *Ceroplastes rubens* is a characteristic soft scale insect native to Australia but has been introduced into Asia, some Pacific Islands, Africa and parts of the Americas. The pink wax scale has over 200 host plants including: mango, avocado, citrus, coconut, custard apple, guava, ginger, coffee, banana, fig, frangipani, hibiscus, longan and pear. The scales are pink in colour, are 3-4 mm in diameter, raised, spherical and have a 'skirt' at their base with an apple-like calyx on the top. The 'skirt' may have four or so waxy white lines on its edges. Brick red eggs are laid under the cavity of the female's body. Mobile crawlers hatch from eggs and eventually settle on host plant and begin feeding on sap.



Pink wax scale (*Ceroplastes rubens*) (Photo: Mike Bowie); Tangerine leaves and fruit blackened by sooty mould (Photo: U.S. Department of Agriculture)

On citrus, the scales feed mainly on leaves, but are also found on stems and fruit. *Ceroplastes rubens* like all scale insects, suck the sap from the host plants and produce honeydew, a sugary excretion which is an attractive food for ants. In return for the honeydew the ants are known to protect &/or disrupt any predators of the scales. Uneaten honeydew drips on to leaves below and is attacked by sooty mould, which turns the honeydew black. The sooty mould is also an issue as leaves badly covered reduce photosynthesis and can eventually kill the leaves. Fruit blackened by sooty mould also look aesthetically unpleasing.

No natural enemies are known in the Cook Islands for the pink wax scale so D-C-Tron &/or Neem Oil are recommended insecticides for these scales but may need to be applied every two weeks until all scales have died. Once they die no more honeydew will be produced and the ant numbers will reduce as well as any sooty mould that may be present. The presence of sooty mould is a good indicator of honeydew producing insect pests (aphids, scales, mealybugs, psyllids, etc.), so keep your eyes open for blackened leaves or lots of ants on your plants that will be feeding on honeydew.

