

HGCA press release statement 28 September 2006.

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Turnip sawfly

Large numbers of turnip sawfly (*Athalia rosae*) adults have been recorded in ground-placed water traps in some of the oilseed rape crops being used to monitor cabbage stem flea beetle numbers in the HGCA-funded study titled 'Revised thresholds for cabbage stem flea beetle' (project ref: RD-2004-3023). The adults are yellow and black in colour, around 7-8 mm in length as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Recent adult sawfly activity in oilseed rape crops is likely to have been favoured by the warmer than average weather this month as the adults fly only at temperatures above 18 °C.



Figure 1. Turnip sawfly adult. September 2006 (JNO).

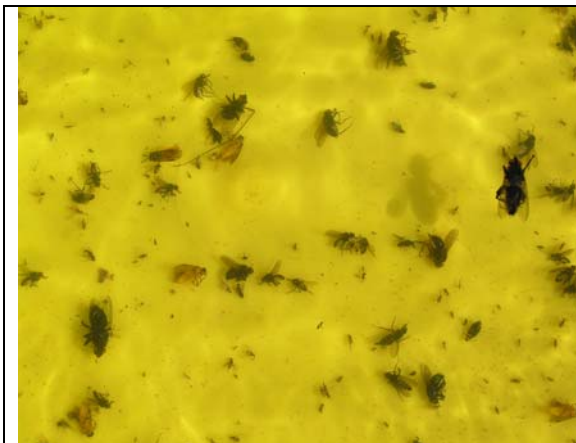


Figure 2. Turnip sawfly adults in water traps sited in oilseed rape. Shropshire 2006 (DBG).

Turnip sawfly larval damage has been confirmed this week on oilseed rape in eastern and southern counties including Essex, Suffolk and Sussex. Obvious infestations are also reported from southern Hampshire where larvae are reaching their full size of 18 mm. The incidence of damage in the South Coast area may therefore be at or near its peak.

Larvae are greenish black in colour and they feed gregariously on leaves which can quickly be skeletonised. There is little published information on the damage potential on oilseed rape in the UK, although reports this week clearly confirm that severe leaf feeding damage is possible. The larvae are described as general and potentially severe feeders on the leaves of brassica plants, including oilseed rape.

Where severe damage to leaves occurs, a spray with a pyrethroid insecticide (one of the many with approval for control of cabbage stem flea beetle on oilseed rape) may be necessary. German work quotes a control threshold of an average of 1-2 larvae per plant. Little information is available on the validity of this threshold under UK conditions and it is offered for guidance only.

It is possible that many of the most vigorous crops this season may be able to compensate for larval damage. More backward crops that emerged slowly from drier seedbeds are potentially at greater risk of significant defoliation by virtue of their lower green leaf area indices.

Leaf damage may also be due to slug grazing or caused by cabbage stem flea beetle adults. Turnip sawfly larvae (if present) are likely to be feeding gregariously and they should therefore be readily visible on damaged leaves.

Background:

Turnip sawfly was considered a serious pest of brassicas in the early 20th century but was thought to have been eradicated until the 1940s when it started to re-appear again as a pest and to establish itself in central, southern and eastern counties. Incidence of this species has, however, been increasing in recent years on vegetable brassica crops and cases of quite severe crop damage were seen in southern England in September 2005.

Further cases of severe damage have been seen this year, for example on stubble turnips. Earlier, second generation, damage was seen in some crops of stubble turnips. The presence of such crops (also mustard and vegetable brassica crops) in an area is likely to have led to increased risk. A third generation occurs after hot summers and the arrival of the adults in oilseed rape then coincides with the early stages of crop emergence.

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