



Republic of Liberia Ministry of Agriculture

CATERPILLAR INFESTATION RESPONSE SITUATION REPORT #3

Reporting Period:
June 25 July 3, 2023

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 (Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Margibi, Gbarpolu, Bomi & River Cess counties) of Liberia's 15 counties are reported infested by the **Achaea catocaloides Guenee**.
- Potentials for low yield in this farming season due to abandonment of farming activities in some affected communities have been reported.
- With technical support from the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL), MOA has deployed teams in four of the seven affected counties to evaluate the level of impact on the livelihoods of affected farmers and communities.
- MOA partners collaborating with international scientists are currently conducting sample testing and studies on the **Achaea catocaloides Guenee** for training and capacity building of local staff to enhance effective control measures of the pest.
- Damages to tree crops and pollution of some creeks and waterways in affected communities have been reported.
- Possibilities for crop loss is very high, especially during the current planting period, because the caterpillars eat any kind of green leaves
- Adapting control measures and response strategies to account for changing weather conditions and season variations remain necessary but posing implementation and timing challenges.
- Weather patterns and seasonal variations are influencing the caterpillar infestation dynamics.
- Currently, the pest has transformed from the Larva (*Caterpillars*) stage into Pupal (*Cocoon*) stage in some of the affected areas and Adult stage (*butterfly-like insect*) in other communities.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Invasion of caterpillars has become endemic to Liberia. 12 out of 15 counties have experienced periodic caterpillar invasion since 1990. The **Achaea Catocaloides Caterpillar** - first showed up in Bong, Lofa, Nimba, and Margibi Counties in 1990. The second caterpillar invasion happened in 2009 affecting Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, River Cess, Sinoe,

Maryland and River-Gee Counties. In June of 2020, the invasion of **Achaea Catocaloides Caterpillar** was reported for the third time in Gbarpolu and Maryland counties.

The spread of the pest was curbed and contained by spraying exercises and by deploying best cultural practices. The caterpillar can contaminate water sources by its feces and thereby depriving rural dwellers from accessing safe drinking water from creeks, rivers, pond, streams, etc. The caterpillar damages forest trees particularly Dahoma species and tree crops. It is aggressive and feeds on plant leaves. The damaging stage of the pest is the larva (caterpillar) which continues its attack on plants and young vegetable fruits for 21 to 22 days.

The current infestation was first confirmed on June 1, 2023 in Bong county and has spread in 7 counties (Margibi, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Bomi, Gbarpolu and Rivercess) to a combined total of 87 communities.

BACKGROUND

In January 2009, huge groups of caterpillars were found destroying forest trees and the leaves of crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, vegetables, etc. and also polluting water sources with their black feces (Black Pupae) in Bong County.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, this was the first major appearance of the insects in Liberia.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Q. What is this insect's name?
 Avc. The scientific name is *Achaea Catocaloides* Guenée.

2. Q. Where did it start in Liberia?
 Avc. Zote District, Bong County.

3. Q. How can people recognize this insect?
 Avc. The caterpillars have three pairs of legs near the head and three pairs around the back. The head is small and black and the caterpillars themselves change from green to black with long lines along the body as they grow.

ASSURANCE

Do not be afraid, the caterpillar appearance is not a curse or a witchcraft. This might be the result of climate change.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF THE INSECT

The insect has four stages of development: eggs, larva, pupa and adults.



Egg stage



Caterpillar stage



Pupa Stage



Adult Moth (Wings spread)



Adult Moth (Wings closed)

Larva stage – Caterpillars
 The caterpillars are the bodies of a butterfly-like insect. They hatch from eggs which are laid in tall forest trees where their mothers like to lay eggs. These trees are usually found near water and even around towns.

Pupal stage
 After a few days, the caterpillars hide under dry leaves on the ground where they remain until they become pupa (cocoon).

Adult stage
 The Pupa remains under the leaves until they develop into adults which emerge and fly off to lay eggs on tree leaves.

HINTS

- Do not drink water that is polluted with caterpillar toilet (pupa).
- Do not be afraid, the caterpillar business is not witchcraft.
- Brush around your towns and villages.
- Everyone should watch out for these caterpillars and get rid of them.
- When you see these caterpillars and pupa, put dry leaves and burn them.
- Wash your hands with soap or ashes with clean water after burning the caterpillars.



MOA & PARTNERS



WHAT TO DO

If you see any large number of caterpillars in your area, give the information to the Community Leader, Health Worker, Agriculture Agent or call Nos. [077708866-522003](tel:077708866522003); [0886400600/0770286104/0770130932](tel:088640060007702861040770130932); [0776390617/0777023043/0886843898](tel:077639061707770230430886843898); [0775502487; 0770182453/0886598781](tel:077550248707701824530886598781).



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 Ministry of Agriculture

FACTS ABOUT THE CATERPILLAR INFESTATION IN LIBERIA



February 2009

International Scientists working with the MOA, CARI and partners are currently conducting sample testing and study of the pest to inform their plan for training and capacity building of local staff.

With technical support from the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL), MOA has deployed teams in four of the seven affected counties to assess the current situation of the caterpillar infestation, identify gaps or challenges and provide recommendations for further actions and interventions to address the pest invasion and support affected farmers and communities.

Due to heavy rainfall, many of the infested areas couldn't be sprayed to destroy the army of caterpillars invading the farms and communities affected, thus they have transformed from the Larva (*Caterpillars*) stage into Pupal (*Cocoon*) stage in some of the affected areas and Adult stage (*butterfly-like insect*) in other communities. This now requires establishment of a strong Early Warning and Early Response mechanism and sustained public awareness on the best control methods.

Images of abandoned water sources polluted by caterpillar feces in some affected communities Zorzor District, Lofa County



COORDINATION

The Incident Management Coordination Unit (IMCU) is the administrative, operational, and technical coordination arm of the Incident Management Systems (IMS) supporting the curbing of the *Achaea* caterpillar's infestation.

MOA through the IMCU's technical and stakeholder engagements and strategic planning meetings, mobilized the resources and necessary logistics (communication, PPEs, pesticides, motorized sprayers, rain suits, knapsack sprayers, safety goggles, gloves, etc. intended to support technicians in the field.

Relevant data from the field are being compiled and analyzed to enhance the production of a comprehensive report on the circumstances and current state of the pest infestation in Liberia.



FUNDING

Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Agriculture and partners have provided the current support for the interventions.

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