

***Nymphocixia caribbea* (Fennah) (Homoptera: Cixiidae) potential candidate as coconut lethal yellowing vector in the Caribbean.**

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Phytoplasmas are associated with coconut lethal yellowing (CLY), a devastating disease of palms in the Caribbean, from Florida to Honduras (actual South West limit) and Nevis (East limit). Only in Florida an insect vector, *Myndus (Haplaxius) crudus* (Homoptera: Cixiidae) was claimed to be the vector of CLY (Howard *et al.*, Trop. Agric. 60,168-171. 1983). However, to date, all experimental trials to transmit CLY by *M. Crudus* in Jamaica and Mexico failed. In Cuba, in the province of Granma, on the narrow coast line overlooked by the hills of the Sierra Maestra, coconut plantations have been severely affected by CLY since the beginning of the 2000s. In 2005 we detected for the first time in Cuba, the cixiid *Nymphocixia caribbea* (Fennah) in an affected plantation, in the locality of Pilon. In 2005, the same species was found in Jamaica, in regions severely affected with CLY. Between 2006 and 2009 several *N. Caribbea* were PCR screened by direct PCR using Caribbean CLY non ribosomal primers (Harrison *et al.*, Plant Pathol.43, 998-1008. 1994), and/or direct PCR using P1/P7 and if required, nested-PCR. Cloning and sequencing showed that sequences obtained from the insects matched the sequences of some phytoplasmas isolated from LY affected palms from Cuba. It is not because CLY phytoplasmas were found in one insect that they are for sure the vectors of CLY. The detected phytoplasmas could originate in the alimentary bolus of insects feeding on diseased coconuts. However, the lack of success of experimental transmissions with *M. crudus* in several regions of the Caribbean outside Florida, the large quantity of *N. Caribbea* found in focuses of CLY in Pilon area, the important number of insects harbouring the LY phytoplasma, are in favour of their involvement in the transmission of the disease, at least in the Granma state of Cuba. Preliminary data (not yet published) showed there are different sub-groups of CLY phytoplasmas in Cuba, different from Florida phytoplasmas. One can think there could be at different vectors, especially in such ecosystems like the narrow cost line in Pilon region.

Reference

Dollet M., Llauger R., Fabre S., Julia J.F., Gonzalez C., Cueto J. 2010. *Nymphocixia caribbea* (Fennah) (Homoptera: Cixiidae) potential candidate as coconut lethal yellowing vector in the Caribbean. COST action FA0807 "Integrated Management of Phytoplasma Epidemics in Different Crop Systems", 2010/02/01-02, Sitges, Spain.