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Thrips damage of grapes

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IN mid-December, a few bunches of Semillon grapes were submitted for examination from a Caversham Vineyard.

The grapes were covered in corky brown scabs (Figs. 1 and 2), while nymphal and adult thrips could be seen on the bunches. These were identified later as being *Thrips imaginis* Bagn., the apple thrips (Fig. 3).

One adult *Taeniothrips simplex* Morrison., the gladiolus thrips, was also found.

The vines on the property were also examined and though the twigs, leaves and branches appeared healthy, every bunch showed some damage.

Only five plants were found to be infested and these were scattered within a small area in rows of vines of the same variety. Although the affected bunches were near clean grapes, the latter bore no sign of thrips.

In local trials carried out several years ago on thrips control, vines showed no differences in setting or yield in treated and untreated plots and no damage to the grapes was noticed in controls which had been heavily infested with thrips.

Damage to grape berries by thrips has not been recorded before in Western Australia, but there are several overseas references which describe and illustrate similar symptoms caused by different thrips species. (Bailey 1942).

A good description is given by Z. G. Solomides, in the Bulletin of Entomological Research, in his “Notes on a Thrips Injurious to Vines in Cyprus.”

The mode of attack is as follows:—The insect scrapes or bites the skin of the grape; it then dips its beak vertically into the pulp and absorbs the juices. If it is not satisfied with the spot chosen, it withdraws its beak and immediately attacks another part of the grape. I have observed that two minutes after a thrips has withdrawn its beak, a faint black spot is formed, and when an insect remained for some time with its beak dipped in the pulp, on its withdrawal, a deep black spot was visible. In two to four days this...
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becomes a clear coffee-colour, and later on, it assumes a cork-like appearance and projects beyond the skin surface. This scab can be easily detached by the finger-nail, and microscopical examination shows that it is not the outer skin of the grape, but is composed of dead tissue or pulp. I have found the tissue was destroyed to a depth of about 15 mm., and all the cellules and tissue of the pulp round the part affected were of a yellowish coffee-colour. These scabs vary in shape and size, also the number of them found on a grape. I have noticed 10 larvae on one grape quietly sucking the juice. Grapes so attacked either do not develop or they dry up; when more lightly attacked they develop, but owing to the presence of these spots, they are disfigured and are unsaleable. In serious attacks, 50 per cent. of the fruit may be spoilt. In cases such as these, the flow of the sap is interfered with, and we may find new flowers and small grapes appearing in July and August; these furnish fresh food for the second and third generations of the insects.

Thrips are often noticed at the end of the season on metropolitan garden vines, attacking the leaves, but they have never been known to damage grapes in the manner described.

It is concluded that thrips commonly found in grapes during the flowering period, may, in some circumstances, attack the immature grapes and cause russetting or scabbing.

So far this appears to be an odd case locally and control measures could not be recommended. However, observations on the vines will be continued next season.

REFERENCES