

Banana skipper butterfly

What is banana skipper?

Banana skipper (*Erionota thrax*) butterfly is from South East Asia, where the caterpillars (larvae) cause the major damage to infested plants. This pest is also known as the banana leaf roller. After hatching, the caterpillars move towards the outer edge of the leaf where they feed and roll the leaf to make a shelter. Within the roll the larva secretes a protective, white, waxy covering. The feeding and rolling destroys the leaves, significantly reducing the plant's leaf area and leading to reduced fruit production, as well as preventing the use of the leaves for traditional purposes.

Banana skipper was particularly devastating to banana crops in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s. However, the release of a biological control agent (larval parasitoid) in 1990 has significantly reduced the effects of this pest.

The close proximity of this pest to northern Australia makes it a real concern for the Australian banana industry.

What do the symptoms look like?

Rolled up leaf sections are the most distinctive symptom of banana skipper. Leaf rolls can extend to 15cm in length. Caterpillars also consume the leaves and can quickly cause significant amounts of defoliation.



Jeff Daniells

Leaf damage as a result of banana skipper butterfly infestation



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Rolled banana leaves are key indicators of the presence of banana skipper butterfly



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The caterpillars curl themselves up in the leaf pieces as they feed and exude a fine, white powdery material. Leaf rolls must be uncurled to see the larvae



Ken Walker

Adult butterflies are brown with large red eyes. They have a wingspan of around 7cm

What does banana skipper look like?

The adult female lays small yellow eggs in batches of 12–25 on lower leaf sides, from which the caterpillars emerge. Caterpillars roll up banana leaf sections and eat the leaves as they grow. They also exude a fine white powdery material over their body. Adult butterflies are brown with three yellow-white areas at the front of their wings. They have a wingspan of around 7cm.

What should I look for?

Look for the presence of rolled-up sections of leaves. Unroll the leaf curls and check for the presence of the caterpillars and/or their white powdery covering.

The adult butterflies are most active in the early evening and are not commonly seen.

How is it spread?

Banana skipper is spread over large distances by the movement of banana planting materials with eggs attached to the leaves. Butterflies can fly within a localised region.

Where is it now?

Banana skipper is currently widespread in South East Asia, and is also found in Papua New Guinea, Mauritius, Guam and Hawaii.

How can I protect my farm from banana skipper?

Check your farm frequently for the presence of new pests and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common banana pests, so you can tell if you see something different.

If you see anything unusual, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

**EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881**

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