

Banana palms

Shannon and Ian Jacobs

Bananas are easy to grow, if you live in the tropics and have even a small corner of land: otherwise just import them.



This stand of banana palms grew from one small rooted piece planted 15 months ago. The largest now have fruit.

The banana is a monocot with square metres of straight-veined leaves on which insects would be easy to find, but apart from random small spiders (not insects) we find very few residents and only occasional visiting wasps and flies.



Asemonea tenuipes: a 7 mm male jumping spider on a banana leaf. Seen occasionally during the day in the dry season.



An small unidentified orb weaver on the banana palms above.

There are just five insect species that we find resident on our bananas. The large biting red ants that are often a problem here do not seem to favour bananas, but there are small ants that forage on leaves and there is one species that sometimes make their nest under the leaf stems that hug the trunk.



Unidentified ants disturbed by removing an outer sheath from the trunk of a banana palm.

Note the presence of queens young and old and many workers.

There is a 4 mm fly that inhabits banana flowers.



These flies have wings but prefer to run around like ants. We mistook them for ants and did not identify them as flies until we photographed them.



Banana flower fly (detail)

Sap suckers

Many hoppers and other sap suckers are attracted to the leaves and stems of the plants we grow for food and fruit flies lay eggs that hatch and ruin the fruit, but the banana is less affected than most. We find only small female scale insects and one species of lace bug.



A 4 mm female scale insect found occasionally on our banana leaves in low numbers that cause no damage.



The banana lace bug (*Tingidae: Stephanitis typica*) is found on the leaves occasionally in ones and twos.

Mating lace bugs.



Many lace bugs are host specific. This one prefers bananas but is found in lower numbers on some other plants. They are small (4 mm) and usually of no concern on small numbers.



A sudden population explosion of banana lace bugs with nymphs and adults.

A large weevil

The banana stand has been here for 15 months and *Odoiporus longicollis*, the banana stem weevil, has taken up residence. It took some time for that to happen.



This large (20 mm) stem boring weevil and its grubs are a pest that commercial banana growers need to suppress, often by the use of pheromone traps. The advice to growers is to clear fallen leaves, cut stems and roots, to reduce the weevil's habitat and restrict breeding and population growth. Because we have only a few plants we don't do this. We may have to eventually, but the weevils do not have it all their own way.

This weevil is alive still but in trouble, having been attacked by a bunch of mites. One species provides food for another in a complex web of relationships.

