

Rodent Damage to Cacao in South India

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Cacao, *Theobroma cacao* is a newly introduced commercial crop of south India and it is damaged by rodents. The species involved are the House rat, *Rattus rattus*; Western ghats squirrel, *Funambulus tristriatus*, and South Indian palm squirrel, *Funambulus palmarum*. House rat, being nocturnal, feeds on the cacao pods during night time and Indian striped squirrels, being diurnal, feeds on the cacao pods during day time.

Rodents damage both mature and immature cacao pods but prefer mature ripe pods. They make holes on the cacao pods and feed on the sweet mucilage surrounding the beans. In a severely infected cacao

garden plenty of scattered cacao beans, in different stages of germination, can be seen round the base of the trees.

A survey has been conducted in the major cacao growing areas of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, in the month of September and December 1977, to assess the intensity of rodent damage to the cacao pods. Each ripe cacao pod was considered as a unit and the number of mature pods including the rodent damaged (fresh) fruit was counted to assess the extent of damage (table below). It can be seen that the percentage of pods damaged range between 8.0 to 51.3.

Table. Rodent damage to cacao

State and District	Number of gardens observed	Percentage of pods damaged
Kerala		
Kozhikode	5	10.5
Palghat	4	17.6
Cannanore	3	30.5
Trichur	2	15.1
Ernakulam	1	51.3
Kottayam	3	33.3
Quilon	2	14.7
Trivandrum	3	8.0
Tamil Nadu		
Kanyakumari	2	30.2
Karnataka		
South Kanara	4	20.2