

Bug Alert

Scutelleridae threatening Star Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus acidus*) recorded in Tamil Nadu

1. Dr. K. Selvam

Department of Agricultural Entomology, Palar Agricultural college,
Kothamarikuppam, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Email: selvamentomology@gmail.com

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Phyllanthus, a genus within the Euphorbiaceae family, derives its name from Greek words signifying "leaf-flower," reflecting the unique characteristic of bearing flowers on its leaves. This genus holds significance as a diverse group of fruit and medicinal plants utilized for various purposes (Rout *et al.*, 2010). One standout member is the Star Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus acidus* Skeels), also known by synonyms like *P. distichus*, *C. acida*, *Averrhoa acida*, *C. acidissima*, *P. distichus*, and *P. acidissimus*. Belonging to the family Euphorbiaceae, Star Gooseberry is valued for its botanical diversity and utility. The scientific classification, as provided by Devi and Paul (2011), underscores its importance within the plant kingdom.

Scutellerid bugs, members of the family Scutelleridae, are known to pose a significant threat to various crops when their populations surge. These shield-backed insects, recognized for their shield-shaped bodies, can cause damage through their herbivorous feeding habits. Their infestations are marked by feeding punctures and stippling on leaves, as well as potential damage to developing seeds. Crop yield reductions and economic losses may

result from severe infestations. *Tectocoris diophthalmus*, or the Hibiscus Harlequin Bug, is a colorful shield-shaped insect known for its vibrant appearance.

The co-occurrence of hibiscus and gooseberry plants in the backyard provides an intriguing ecological setting that may influence the infestation dynamics of *Tectocoris diophthalmus*. Empirical evidence suggests that *T. diophthalmus*, specifically targeting star gooseberry (*Phyllanthus acidus*) (L.) Skeels, engages in direct feeding on the berries, as depicted in Figures 1-4. Utilizing their rostrum, the bugs induce brown spots on the berries, culminating in the formation of holes, particularly under conditions of severe infestation. Scientific inquiry into the interplay between *T. diophthalmus*, hibiscus, and gooseberry unveils a complex relationship with potential ramifications for pest management strategies. The observed insect-plant interactions underscore the necessity for a nuanced understanding of ecological factors shaping pest dynamics in mixed plant settings (spotted in 12°44'50.5"N 77°49'13.1"E, Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India).



Figure 01



Figure 02



(source for the identification of insect from GBIF is a Global Core Biodata Resource)

Reference

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