

INTRODUCTION

The cacao thrips, Selenothrips rubrocinctus Giard, presents two problems to the economic entomologist.

The first relates to the epidemic outbreaks of the pest, which occur at irregular intervals, and are its most spectacular feature. Little is known of the causes of these outbreaks. The second problem is provided by the small, persistent infestations, always to be found in areas under cacao cultivation. These infestations are confined to definite places, colloquially known as thrips pockets.

In Trinidad, B.W.I., where the work described below was carried out, cacao is grown under permanent overhead shade, provided by the anauca immortal, Erythrina micropteryx, and the bocare immortal, Erythrina glauca. Observations by both planters and entomologists have made it clear that reduction of this shade is often, if not invariably, followed by increased infestations. The most obvious effect of the removal of part of the immortal canopy is the increased amount of light that pours uninterruptedly onto the cacao beneath. The regularity with which such a light pocket develops into a thrips pocket has led to the belief that light itself is the deciding factor in the endemic incidence of the pest. The object of the work described below was to investigate the validity of this claim.