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Opogona sacchari (Bojer, 1856) a new record from the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Tineidae)

Aldo Catania, Anthony Seguna, John J. Borg & Paul Sammut

Abstract

The genus *Opogona* Zeller, 1853 and the species *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) are recorded for the first time from the Maltese Islands.

Keywords: Lepidoptera, Tineidae, *Opogona sacchari*, new record, Maltese Islands.

Opogona sacchari **(Bojer, 1856) nuevo registro para Malta (Lepidoptera: Tineidae)**

Resumen

El género *Opogona* Zeller, 1853 y la especie *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) se registran por primera vez para Malta.

Palabras clave: Lepidoptera, Tineidae, *Opogona sacchari*, nuevo registro, Malta.

Introduction

In Europe the family Tineidae comprises 278 species in 52 genera (Gaedike et al. 2011). In the Maltese Islands this group is represented by 32 species and 17 genera (Sammut, 2020). Tineidae feed on anything, from vegetative matter to carcasses. The majority of the species construct cases which they carry during their larval stages and pupate within them. *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856), is a pest of plants, normally living in the crown and fruit. However, the species is polyphagous and feeds on no less than 22 different genera of plants, amongst which are greenhouse ornamentals, many times reaching pest levels (Koppert, 2022). *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) has also been reported as feeding on pineapples, bamboo, maize, and sugarcane in the field, but also as infesting various stored tubers. In European countries, it has been recorded on various tropical or subtropical ornamentals, including Cactaceae, *Dracaena*, *Strelitzia* and *Yucca, Alpinia, Begonia*, *Bougainvillea*, Bromeliaceae, *Chamaedorea* and other palms, *Cordyline*, *Dieffenbachia, Euphorbia pulcherrima, Ficus, Gloxinia, Heliconia, Hippeastrum, Maranta, Philodendron, Sansevieria* and *Saintpaulia,* and also *Capsicum* and *Solanum melongena* L. (Cabi, 2022). Its larvae are difficult to detect as they feed inside the host plant tissue. This is especially so during the first larval instars which hide in cracks, bulbs, or other plant structures. (Van Der Gaag et al. 2013). Its spreading is attributed to imports for greenhouses and the growing of ornamental plants. *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) is reported to adapt to outdoor climate on the Canary Islands, Madeira, and the Azores. These countries have a warm and dry climate

comparable to that of the Mediterranean basin, so the possibility of it establishing itself in Malta is very likely.

In Europe, the genus *Opogona* Zeller 1853, comprises three species, namely *Opogona omoscopa* (Meyrick, 1893) recorded from the Azores in Portugal and from Sardinia in Italy; *Opogona antistacta* Meyrick, 1937, which was "bred from larva found in London feeding under slight tubular web on rind of banana" (Rennwald, 2022) and *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) ranging across Africa, Asia, Europe and America. (Van Der Gaag et al. 2013)

Material examined: MALTA, Żebbuġ, 1 ♀, 13-II-2022 Catania leg; Gozo Island, Xaghra, 1 ♀, 14-IX-2005 at light.

Two specimens have been collected from the Maltese islands. The first, Xaghra in Gozo was recorded at a 125W MV light trap, while the second specimen was collected from Żebbuġ in Malta. This specimen must have been an accidental import with daffodil bulbs bought from a plant nursery at Burmarrad earlier in December 2021. On examining these bulbs, it was noticed that the degree of damage done by the larvae stopped the normal growth of leaves and flowers. This specimen from Żebbuġ has a wingspan of 30 mm while the specimen from Xaghra has a wingspan of 21 mm.

Discussion: *Opogona sacchari* (Bojer, 1856) was originally described from the Mascarene Islands (Africa). Later it was reported also from continental Africa and other African islands. Its presence on Madeira, Azores, the Canary Islands, and continental Europe had also been reported. It is typically an Old-World tropical species and is capable of dispersing and getting established in the tropical belt and in areas with a Mediterranean climate. We propose the Maltese name "Opogona taz-Zokkor", after the transliteration of the word sacchari.

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*Aldo Catania
Rama-Rama, 27
Triq Monsinjur Anton Cilia
MT-Żebbuġ ZBG 3140
MALTA / *MALTA*
E-mail: aldocatania47@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7559-143X

Anthony Seguna
68 Redeemer, Triq l-Emigrant
MT-Naxxar, NXR3200
MALTA / *MALTA*
E-mail: seguna@onvol.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6264-0690

John J. Borg
National Museum of Natural History
Pjazza Publju
MT-L-Imdina, MDN 1010
MALTA / *MALTA*
E-mail: john.j.borg@gov.mt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0587-3682

Paul Sammut
137/2, Dingli Road
MT-Rabat, RBT9023
MALTA / *MALTA*
E-mail: farfett@onvol.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2019-9577

*Autor para la correspondencia / *Corresponding author*

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