Hirsutella species associated with hoppers (Homoptera) in Thailand

Hirsutella Pat. was erected for Hirsutella entomorrhiza Pat. attacking an adult beetle (Coleoptera) (Patouillard, 1892). Patouillard considered this a clavariaceous hymenomycete but Speare (1920) questioned its placement in the basidiomycetes, presenting ample evidence that Hirsutella was ‘a rather definite form genus of the Fungi Imperfecti’. This conclusion has, rightly, never been questioned.

Speare’s redescription of Hirsutella noted it to be synnematous, ‘composed of numerous somewhat interwoven but nearly parallel septate hyphae that adhere to one another tenaciously’. He noticed that the spores have ‘a gelatinous substance which surrounds and renders them citriform in appearance’. Speare (1920) observed that ‘the greater number of hosts are found among the Hemiptera, the family Fulgoridae being particularly conspicuous’. The ‘Hemiptera’ of Speare’s paper are plant-, leaf-, tree- or froghoppers now placed in the insect order Homoptera.

Mains (1951) was the next to review the genus which, by this time, contained species that were not synnematous, species that did not have a mucilaginous coat around the conidia and species that were pathogenic to invertebrates other than insects. Mains (1951) particularly questioned the inclusion of mononematous species in a genus traditionally regarded within the Stilbaceae. He wrote for mononematous Hirsutella spp. that in ‘the most generally accepted classification of the Moniliiales such species belong in the Moniliaceae and those with synnemata, typified by Hirsutella entomophila, in the Stilbaceae’. Mains reviewed nine synnematous species in detail, accepting nine others and dismissing a further nine which were ‘without synnemata and probably should be placed in the Moniliaceae’.

It was left to Minter & Brady (1980) to review the mononematous Hirsutella species noting that the monumental work of Hughes (1953) allowed the inclusion of mononematous and synnematous species within the same genus. These authors also mentioned the tendency to include mononematous and synnematous species within different sections of the same genus as Samson (1974) did for Paecilomyces Bainier. Consequently, Minter & Brady (1980) erected the section Mononematosae within Hirsutella and included ten species.

Speare (1920) predicted that teleomorphs, when found, would probably be ‘species of Cordyceps or related genera’. Petch (1924) was the first to make this association noting that the ant pathogen Cordyceps unilateralis (Tul.) Sacc. had a Hirsutella anamorph which he later named Hirsutella formicarum Petch (Petch, 1935). There are now many records of Hirsutella associated with Cordyceps and the related Torrubiella Boudier bearing out Speare’s prediction.

A 7-yr survey of invertebrate-associated fungi in Thailand has recognized several species of Hirsutella associated with clavicipitaceous teleomorphs. Two new Cordyceps were described from Lepidoptera larvae which produced mononematous Hirsutella species in pure culture (Hywel-Jones, 1994). Torrubiella iriomoteana Kobayasi and Torrubiella siamensis Hywel-Jones were described from scale insects (Homoptera) in Thailand and were associated in the field with mononematous Hirsutella species whose spores lacked a mucilaginous coat (Hywel-Jones, 1995 a). Cordyceps brunneapunctata Hywel-Jones infecting elaterid larvae (Coleoptera) is also associated with a Hirsutella sp. both in the field and in pure culture (Hywel-Jones, 1995 b). This paper describes three Hirsutella spp. recorded from hopper hosts in Thailand.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Surveys were made at Khao Yai National Park over a 7-yr period and, sporadically, at other National Parks and Wildlife Reserves in Thailand over a 3-yr period. Collections of invertebrate-associated fungi were made from the underside
of living leaves of herbs and saplings in natural forest. Material was returned to the laboratory in plastic boxes and stored in a refrigerator before being processed. Isolations were made using methods described elsewhere (Hywel-Jones, 1995b).

**TAXONOMY**


Stroma sulphur yellow to pale brown or tawny brown. Ascomata crowded, immersed in stroma, ovoid, walls dark golden brown, 360–460 × 280–350 µm. Asci clavate, hyaline, 140–150 × 10 µm at maturity, 8-spored. Ascospores distoseptate with eight cells at maturity, 22–32 × 3.3–5.3 µm.

Anamorph *Hirsutella versicolor* mononematous. Conidiogenous cells hyaline, smooth-walled. Basal part 8–12 × 2.5–3 µm with attenuated phialide 6–8 µm long – combined length of up to 22 µm. Conidia smooth-walled, hyaline, elongate oval 3.5–4.5 × 1.1–1.5 µm, surrounded by prominent mucous coat.

Specimens examined in Thailand: All collections in this study are stored in the BIOTEC invertebrate-fungus collection. All specimens were on Homoptera (Cicadellidae) attached to the underside of living leaves of dicotyledonous plants except where otherwise stated.


**Anamorph only:** NHJ373.04, 9 Jan. 1991, Khao Yai National Park – trail along tributary above Heo Narok waterfall, NLH-J.

**Isolates examined:** All isolates in this study are stored in the BIOTEC fungus collection with the author’s codes.

NHJ616.01 from ascospores.

The host contains thick-walled hyphal bodies up to 35 µm long and 2–6 µm diam. A thick weft of tortuous but slightly branched sulphur yellow mycelium completely covers the insect. This extends over the surface of the leaf as a thin hyaline film of anastomosing hyphae. Perithecioid ascomata are immersed in the byssoid stroma with about 40–50 µm of the conic ostiole projecting. The projecting ascomata are dark golden brown.
Inside the ascoma asci are at all stages of development (Figs 1–3). When immature, asci are 5·5–6·5 µm diam. across the apex while at maturity the asci are 10–12 µm across (Fig. 1). There is a prominent canal up to 2–2·5 µm across (Fig. 1). Asci are cylindrical tapering only at the foot to about 4 µm wide (Fig. 2). Immature ascospores are aseptate but become 7-septate at maturity (Fig. 3).

The stroma of *T. prinaosa* contains conidiogenous cells of a mononematous *Hirsutella* (Fig. 4). This is mainly monophialidic (rarely polyphialidic). The conidiogenous cells usually arise directly from the underlying hyphae but occasionally there is an intermediate cylindrical cell 7–12 µm long. On the host the developing conidia are usually surrounded by an opaque mucilaginous coat 2·5–3 µm diam. There is no evidence that spores develop in balls and they are not seen adhering to each other. Discharged conidia are sometimes still surrounded by the mucilaginous coat. More often this coat disappears and the shape of the conidia is seen (Fig. 5).

Isolations were not successful from conidia, but ascospores on PDA germinated to produce a single stout lateral germ-tube. Isolations were also secured from ascospores within whole asci. Growth was very slow for 3–4 months after which time the culture established itself on PDA. Isolations remained slow growing, stromatic, with a purple diffusible pigment. In time the culture established itself on PDA. Isolations were also secured from ascospores within the agar the cells were swollen. On the stromatic hyphae there was a prominent canal up to 2–2·2 µm diam. There is no evidence that spores develop in balls and they are not seen adhering to each other. Discharged conidia are sometimes still surrounded by the mucilaginous coat. More often this coat disappears and the shape of the conidia is seen (Fig. 5).

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**Hirsutella citriformis** Speare, *Mycolegia* 12: 70 (1920)


Teleomorph: Not known.

*Stroma* lacking external mycelium apart from brown to purple-brown sparse mycelium attaching host to substrate. *Synnemata* many, from all over the host, up to 15 mm long, 30–50 µm across. Composed of a tightly packed core of parallel strands of mycelium, simple or with short lateral branches, 100–150 µm long 30 µm diam. *Conidiogenous cells* monophialidic, with ellipsoid base tapering abruptly to long, phialidic neck, 18·5–52 × 3–3·5 µm wide. *Conidia* hyaline, aseptate, smooth-walled, fusiform or elliptical, 3·5–5 µm long, 1–1·5 µm wide, surrounded by mucilaginous coat.

**Specimens examined in Thailand:** All were on Homoptera and (except where stated otherwise) were attached to the underside of a dicotyledonous leaf.


**Isolates examined:** NHJ298.01, NH662.01, NHJ924.01.

The host is filled with a tightly packed mass of thin-walled hyphal bodies which are variable in size and shape. The synnemata emerge from all over the host and usually have small side branches. Conidiogenous cells are produced over the whole length of the synnema and are intercalary along the length of the mycelial strands as well as terminal towards the apex of the synnema. Conidiogenous cells have a prominent, swollen basal part with a long phialidic neck (Fig. 7). Conidia are normally in a prominent mucilaginous coat (Fig. 7) and are either solitary or occasionally paired.

Conidia on PDA germinated in 12–16 h. Colonies were hyaline to pale grey with a grey-brown reverse. They grew slowly (40 mm in 30 d at 22 °C). Lilac grey synnemata up to 10–15 mm long were produced after 4–6 wk when the fungus had grown to the edge of the 5 cm Petri plate. The synnema had many conidiogenous cells with conidia.

**Hirsutella nivea** Hywel-Jones sp. nov. (Figs 8–9)

**Teleomorph:** Not known.

*Mycelium* contegens hospitem membrana densa et nivea. *Synnemata* acerosa, singularia, 8–13 mm longa. *Cellulae conidiogenae* monophialidic, subulate, 5·5–9·5 µm longa, 0·5 µm lata, tunica mucilagina non visa.


*Stroma* covering the insect in a compact white film, spreading over the leaf. *Synnemata* single (rarely double), from between the head and thorax of the host (rarely from the abdomen), needle-like, 8–13 mm long, 200–300 µm at the base, tapering to the tip. Composed of a loose association of parallel strands of mycelium. *Conidiogenous cells* monophialidic, subulate, 12·5–15·5 µm long, base 1–2 µm across, hyaline. *Conidia* acerosa, hyaline, aseptate, smooth-walled, 5·5–9·5 µm long, 0·5 µm wide, lacking a mucilaginous coat.

Holotype NHJ665.01 on a leafhopper (Homoptera: Cicadellidae) attached to the underside of a dicotyledonous leaf in forest, trail from Gong Giao to Heo Sawat, Khao Yai National Park, Nakorn Ratxassima Province, Thailand, N. L. Hywel-Jones, 12 Dec. 1991.
Conidia (bar a general repository for phragmosporous species with bright-teleomorph in fungus. They noted that it was inappropriate to place the Hirsutella species Minter & Brady (1980) discussed Petch’s Speare (Petch, 1924). In their review of mononematous anamorph Petch (1932) described DISCUSSION conidia were put on agar media none germinated.

Fig. 8. Phialides (bar = 10 µm). Fig. 9. Conidia (bar = 7.5 µm).

Specimens examined in Thailand: These were all on Homoptera – Cicadellidae attached to the underside of dicotyledonous leaves.


The host is filled with a tightly packed mass of thin-walled hyphal bodies which are often in lines. There is a compact white byssoid stroma completely covering the host. A single synnema usually arises from between the head and thorax but occasionally two are formed. The synnema is broad at the base (300–600 µm), gradually tapering to a rounded tip 100–150 µm across. It is composed of loose, parallel strands of hyphae which trap air between them. The phialidal conidigenous cells are scattered over the outer strands of the mycelium making up the synnema (Fig. 8). One or more phialides arise from each basal cell. Conidigenous cells are also present on the repent mycelium covering the body of host. Acerose conidia are attached to the phialides at their rounded bases but are easily dislodged (Fig. 9). Although conidia were put on agar media none germinated.

DISCUSSION

Petch (1932) described T. pruinosa (as Calonectria) from a leafhopper on bamboo in Sri Lanka. He also named the anamorph H. versicolor having previously identified this as H. floccosa Speare (Petch, 1924). In their review of mononematous Hirsutella species Minter & Brady (1980) discussed Petch’s fungus. They noted that it was inappropriate to place the teleomorph in Calonectria ‘which has been used in the past as a general repository for phragmosporous species with bright-coloured perithecia’. They re-assigned it to Torrubiella as T. pruinosa (Petch) Minter & B. L. Brady.

Kobayasi (1982) and Kobayasi & Shimizu (1982) did not record T. pruinosa, discussing only T. hemipterigena Petch from leafhopper hosts. Samson, Evans & Latgé (1988) illustrated T. pruinosa on a leafhopper but chose to retain it in Calonectria while regarding this genus as ‘poorly known or taxonomically unclear’. Although Calonectria is not an appropriate genus for T. pruinosa as Minter & Brady (1980) discussed I do not believe that Torrubiella is wholly appropriate either.

All Torrubiella spp. recorded to date have hyaline, thin-walled, filiform ascospores (Kobayasi & Shimizu, 1982) which usually separate into part-spores. The ascospores of T. pruinosa are fusiform, distoseptate with a faint hint of pigmentation. Distoseptate, pigmented ascospores are characteristic of Cordycepioides Stifter (Hypocreaceae) and T. pruinosa might be regarded as a non-clavate form of this genus. For now, I will accept with reservations the transfer of T. pruinosa from Calonectria to Torrubiella by Minter & Brady (1980).

The material gathered in Thailand compares with Petch’s description although he did not illustrate the fungus. Comparison with the drawing of Minter & Brady suggested at first that there might be a different species involved. They reported the ascospores were 6–9 septate when mature whereas Petch (1932) noted that the ascospores were 7-septate. In Thai specimens ascospores were never seen with more than eight cells. Ascus and ascospore development was not synchronous and it did not appear to be synchronized within individual asci either. Individual asci can contain developing ascospores, some with a single septum, some with two and some with three.

Petch (1932) noted that the two ends of the ascospores were different. He described the apex as ‘obtuse, lower end attenuated and aseptate for 6–10 µm’. In Thai material this arrangement is very clear (Fig. 3) with the ‘obtuse’ end of the ascospore toward the tip of the ascus while the ‘attenuated’ end is toward the foot of the ascus (Figs 1, 2). Petch (1932) described paraphyses as ‘linear, shorter than the asci’. Minter & Brady (1980) made no mention of paraphyses. None were seen in the Thai material and I assume that what Petch considered paraphyses were immature asci.

Petch observed that the ascospores appeared to be surrounded ‘sometimes with a mucilaginous coat, 1 µm thick’. This was undoubtedly the outer wall of the distoseptate spore. There was no evidence in Thai specimens that this was mucilaginous and spores were never seen adhering to each other. Although Petch (1932) did not culture either of the two states he linked them on the basis of their occurrence together on the same stroma. In Thai specimens the teleomorph was always associated with the Hirsutella state. There was a single collection where the teleomorph was absent and only the anamorph was present. The anamorph in the field matched with that from ascospores grown in pure culture. This helps to confirm the link between T. pruinosa and H. versicolor.

To date, T. pruinosa and H. versicolor have only been reported, in Thailand, from Khao Yai National Park. Apart from a single collection in June (wet season) this fungus appears to be more common in the cool and hot season (October to April) when rainfall is low. However, until more
extensive collections are made little more can be said about the temporal distribution.

_H. citriformis_ is one of the most commonly reported Hirsutella species on insects. It appears to have migrated from natural forest and is often recorded as a mortality factor in agricultural hopper pests in the tropics (Roberts & Wraight, 1986; Rombach et al., 1986; Aguda et al., 1987). It does not seem to have been recorded from insects in natural habitats before. _H. citriformis_ has (in Thailand) transferred from natural habitats to become an obvious mortality factor of the rice brown planthopper (BPH). Although it kills large numbers of BPH this is on rice that is close to harvesting. The overall effect of this pathogen on the BPH populations is unknown.

Hywel-Jones (unpubl. obs.) collected _H. citriformis_ in large numbers from BPH in the Solomon Islands in April 1986. Also, in the Solomon Islands this species had transferred quickly to the Leucaena psyllid — _Heteropsyilla cubana_ Crawford (Homoptera; Psyllidae) which had arrived in the islands during the previous 12 months (MacFarlane, pers. comm.). _H. cubana_ became a serious pest of _Leucaena_ in Thailand after it was first reported in September 1986 (Napompeth, 1990). Although _H. citriformis_ has transferred from the forest to BPH populations on rice it has not been recorded from the Leucaena psyllid yet (N. L. Hywel-Jones, unpubl. obs.).

The collection of _H. citriformis_ from BPH was part of a large epizootic where there were 5–10 infected adults per ‘hill’ of rice. The epizootic was spectacular and only the occasional living adult was found. Some BPH must have been ready to migrate as they were attached to the rice seed whereas their normal feeding and resting sites are at the base of the rice. The other collections of _H. citriformis_ from insects in natural forest yielded only three specimens in 1200 man hours of survey spread over 7 years. _H. citriformis_ was particularly prevalent on BPH on rice toward the end of the monsoon wet season (October to February).

The new species, _H. nivea_, was found on large cicadellids (body length up to 12 mm). Unlike the previous two species which seemed restricted to central Thailand this was found in tropical evergreen forest in Khao Yai and in the rain forest of southern Thailand at Khao Luang. At Khao Yai it was only recorded in the cool dry season when rainfall and temperature were lower (January and February). At Khao Luang it was recorded in May during the hot dry season.

With its needle-shaped conidia _H. nivea_ comes closest to the ant-pathogenic _Hirsutella acerosa_ H. C. Evans & Samson (Evans & Samson, 1984). It differs significantly from this species in having smaller, more slender conidia (length/width ratio of 11–19 for _H. nivea_ compared with 7.2–12 for _H. acerosa_) which are not aggregated in a mucous coat. The smaller subulate phialides of _H. nivea_ are also different to those of _H. acerosa_. When Evans & Samson (1984) described _H. acerosa_ they reported that the ‘conidia of _H. acerosa_ can be readily distinguished from those of any previously described species of _Hirsutella_ and, although somewhat larger, strongly resemble the conidia of _Hymenostilbe formicarium_’. Both _H. acerosa_ and the new species _H. nivea_ are therefore quite distinct from other members of the genus.

It is a pleasure to thank Dr Banpot Napompeth who provided a home for this project for over 7 years. The logistical support of the National Research Council for Thailand and of the Royal Forest Department and of the many officers and guides at the various National Parks we survey is gratefully acknowledged. Dr Gary Samuels is thanked for commenting on the manuscript.

**REFERENCES**


(Accepted 29 January 1997)