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Two Incidences of Rat Damage in Sabah and Importance of Rat Control in Immature Oil Palm

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Rat is an important pest of oil palm. These rats include Rattus tiomanicus (Malayan or Malaysian wood rat /Tikus belukar), Rattus argentiventer (Rice field rat/Tikus sawah), Rattus exulans (Pacific rat/Tikus rumah kecil), Rattus rattus diardii (Malaysian house rat/Tikus rumah), Sundamys muelleri (Swamp giant rat/Tikus ayer) and Bandicota indica (Greater bandicoot rat/Tikus wirok). Rats can be found in oil palm nurseries, new plantings, replants, immature and mature plantings. They attack all stages of oil palm from germinated seeds planted in plastic cells or in polybags to mature palms. They chew on frond bases and subsequently feed on the succulent apical growing point, "cabbage/palm heart", of immature palms, feed on unopened inflorescence of both sexes, unripe and ripe fruits and post anthesis male inflorescence (PAMI) of mature palms. Observation on rat damage in immature oil palm is described briefly with reference to two incidences near Lahad Datu and Tawau, Sabah, including the importance of rat control. Crop losses and rat control in immature oil palm including the implications of other animals feeding on commercial rat baits are also discussed.

Keywords: Rat species, oil palm, damage, rat control.

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