

THE POTENTIAL THREAT OF *SIREX NOCTILIO* F. TO ZIMBABWE'S FORESTRY INDUSTRY.

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Zimbabwe is a land-locked country in Southern Africa covering more than 39 million hectares. Of the 39 million hectares 108214 ha (or 0.3%) of the total area is under commercial plantations which are mainly found in the Eastern Highlands. According to the 2004/05 plantation forestry statistics, the distribution of commercial tree species is as follows: pines 71771ha (66.32%), eucalyptus 26274ha (24.28%), wattle 10009ha (9.25%) and popular 160ha (0.15%). Of the commercial plantations 61816ha are privately owned while 38326ha are owned by the state.

Zimbabwe's economy depends heavily on natural resources for employment creation, generation of foreign currency and sustenance of livelihoods. The Forestry sector contributes about 3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) largely from exotic plantations and commercial indigenous timber. According to the employment statistics of 2004/05 the formal forestry sector in Zimbabwe employed a total of 14253 people and many more were employed in the downstream industries.

Major threats to the exotic forest plantations in Zimbabwe include: fires, baboon damage (especially in pines), droughts, floods, both indigenous and invasive alien insect pests and diseases. Since the establishment of exotic plantations in Zimbabwe, exotic invasive insect pests were either accidentally introduced or spread into our country. This has been made worse by the increase in international trade and globalization which increased the permeability of Zimbabwe's borders to invasive forestry insect pests such as *Sirex noctilio*. Of major concern in Zimbabwe's timber industry is that all commercial pine species are susceptible to *S. noctilio*. The country shares borders with South Africa, Zambia, Botswana and Mozambique. Even though *Sirex noctilio* has not been sighted in Zimbabwe, it will not be long before it spreads into the country.

Key words: Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, *Sirex noctilio*, invasive forestry insect pests.



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