

Short communication

STUDY ON REARING AND BIOLOGY OF *Bracon brevicornis*

Abstract

The extensive use of synthetic insecticides in agriculture, especially in developing countries, has caused severe environmental and health issues, such as pest resistance and biodiversity loss. This study explores the potential of biological control as a sustainable alternative by examining the life table parameters of the parasitoid wasp *Bracon brevicornis* (Hymenoptera: Braconidae) on its host, *Corcyra cephalonica* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae). The research involved rearing *C. cephalonica* and *B. brevicornis* under controlled conditions and monitoring their life cycle stages. Key findings include an incubation period of 1.5 days, a larval period of 4.5 days, and a pupal period averaging 5 days, with adult longevity ranging from 23 to 40 days. The study observed high rates of egg hatching (89.3%), pupation (95.8%), and adult emergence (93.8%), and an average fecundity of 200-240 eggs. These results highlight *B. brevicornis* as a promising biological control agent, offering an eco-friendly alternative to chemical pesticides.

Keywords: *Bracon brevicornis*, Biology, Biocontrol agent

INTRODUCTION:

The widespread use of synthetic insecticides in modern agriculture across developing countries has proven effective in quickly reducing pest populations. However, prolonged and indiscriminate application has led to significant issues. These include environmental contamination, biodiversity loss, the emergence of insecticide-resistant pests, pest resurgence, outbreaks of secondary pests, increased reliance on chemical inputs, and toxicological hazards from pesticide residue accumulation in the food chain. Addressing these challenges is crucial for achieving efficient insect control and mitigating environmental and health risks. (Armes *et al.*, 1992; Kranthi *et al.*, 2002).

In recent years, the growing public concern over potential health hazards of synthetic pesticides has led to the exploration of biological control agents due to their environmental feasibility, eco-friendliness and sustainability. Biological control of pest insects by natural enemies may be potential, cost effective and eco-friendly alternative to synthetic pesticides.

The cosmopolitan parasitoid wasps, *Bracon brevicornis* Wesmael and *B. hebetor* Say (Hymenoptera: Braconidae) are specific for lepidopterans. Braconid wasps represent one of the most diverse and abundant of parasitoid groups. These wasps are mostly ectoparasitoids, with the

larvae developing on the outside of the body of the host. Recorded hosts include the larvae of many species of lepidopterans like *Corcyra cephalonica*, Corn borer (*Sesamia cretica*), European corn borer (*Ostrinia nubilias*), *Galleria mellonella*, *Helicoverpa armigera* and *Spodoptera litura*, beetles, flies, hymenopterans, and true bugs. They are idiobionts, halting the development of the host when they lay eggs on its body. They have a single recurrent vein. They often pupate in silken cocoon outside the host. They are either solitary or gregarious in nature.

This paper is an attempt to study the life table parameters of the parasitoid, *B. brevicornis* on one of its laboratory host, *Corcyra cephalonica* Stainton under laboratory conditions. Life table studies of parasitoids and predators provide necessary information on their effectiveness against target pests, rate of population build-up, etc. under laboratory conditions which can be correlated to natural conditions (Muthukrishnan *et al.*, 1995) and to schedule period of intervals for parasitoid releases. Life table computation helps in studying the population dynamics of the insect species and is an analytical tool which provide a description of the survivorship, development, etc. and reveal the maximum growth potential of a population (Gabre *et al.*, 2004).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Rearing of Corcyra cephalonica

Materials required corcyra rearing:

Sterilized sorghum, *Corcyra* rearing boxes/trays/jars made up of plastic or wood with lid provided with wire mesh for aeration, *Corcyra* egg laying cage, Black cloth, Mosquito net, Table, Racks for placing, *Corcyra* cages, Honey, Glycerin, Tubes for collecting *Corcyra* moth, Measuring cylinder, Plastic tubs for egg laying purpose, Brush, Roasted ground nut powder - 100 grams, Yeast - 5 grams, Wettable sulphur - 5 grams, Streptomycin sulphate - 0.05 gms

Preparation of egg laying cage of Corcyra cephalonica

Take a plastic bucket with lid. Cut the lid in circular shape leaving space for providing /fixing wire mesh for egg laying purpose in the (circular wire mesh). Make a hole on the centre of bottom of the plastic bucket to pour the collected adults in the bucket. Keep bucket inverted in the plastic tub for egg laying purposes.

Production of Corcyra cephalonica

Sterilize the rearing boxes (if wooden) in hot air oven for 100 degree centigrade for 30 minutes. If plastic trays are used, wash them before use. Dry broken grains of jowar in sunlight

properly and pour sterilized grain - 2.5 kg/box/tray. Add 100 grams of roasted ground nut powder, 5 grams of yeast, 5 grams of wettable sulphur, 0.05 gms of streptomycin sulphate in each box or tray. Mix well all ingredients. Sprinkle 1 cubic centimeter of *Corcyra* eggs/box/tray on the top of mixture(culture medium). Cover the box with lid, label the date of inoculation. Keep these boxes in racks protected by ant pans. Favourable temperature for rearing is 28+/-2 degree centigrade and Relative humidity, 75% +/- 5%. The moth starts emerging on 40th day. Bring the boxes ready for moth emergence and collect moths inside the net by glass tubes. Transfer the moths to egg laying chamber. Provide cotton soaked 20% honey+ vitamin E solution as adult food in the egg laying chamber. Collect the eggs daily and pour the eggs in a paper by tilting slightly downward so eggs come down side where as dust particles remain in upper side. Clean the eggs further by passing through different size sieves to 10, 15 and 40 meshes. Discard the moth after 4 days. Utilize the *Corcyra* eggs for *Trichogramma* production (or) host culture or store them in refrigerator at 10 degree centigrade for 7 days, if required.

Rearing of *Bracon brevicornis*

Materials required:

Bracon spp., *Corcyra* eggs, Honey, Cotton, Containers, Muslin cloth, Rubber bands, Petri dishes, Tissue paper

Production procedure:

B. brevicornis is amenable for mass rearing in the laboratory on the alternate host, *Corcyra cephalonica*. For small scale culture, glass chimney and the 'Sandwich' technique are adequate. About 20 mated females are confined in a glass chimney, covering both sides of the chimney with muslin sheet held in place with rubber bands. A cotton swab soaked in 50% honey water solution is stuck to the side of the chimney to serve as food. With many hymenoptera, adult nutrition is of great importance as it influences sex-ratio. High protein diet at times improves the sex ratio so that more female progeny are produced. 'Proteinex' can be used to produce the desired results. Replacing honey with levulose or fructose also is beneficial in some cases. Exposure to sunlight frequently stimulates mating, oogenesis and fertilization of eggs.

Life table studies:

About 10 full grown larvae of *Corcyra* are placed between two sheets of facial tissue paper and placed over the muslin sheet covering the wider mouth of the chimney. The tissue is again covered with a sheet of muslin and fastened with a pair of rubber bands. The chimney is then placed with the host larvae facing a window or light source. Females of *B. brevicornis* are attracted to the host larvae, probe through the muslin and paralyze the larvae on each of which they lay about 25 eggs per day. At the end of 24 hours, the tissue sheets bearing parasitized larvae are removed and held in flat plastic containers until the parasitoid grubs hatch, complete development and spin cocoons. Two day old adults of *B. brevicornis* could be stored for 30 days at 50°C and 50-60% RH. We need to check the fungal growth on cotton swab if infested then change it. Frequently we need to reimmerge the cotton swab in 10% honey solution. We observed the eggs daily and calculated hatching percentage and mortality rate by using following formula (Fig 1).

$$\text{Hatching (\%)} = \frac{\text{No of eggs hatched} \times 100}{\text{No of eggs laid}}$$

$$\text{Mortality rate} = 100 - \text{Hatching (\%)}$$

Larval duration was worked out by making observations daily after completion of larval stage cocoon formation takes place. Later the strips were cleaned and kept into a large box. Pupal duration and pupal percent were worked out.

$$\text{Pupal(\%)} = \frac{\text{No of pupae formed} \times 100}{\text{Total no. of larvae}}$$

After adult emergence they were provide with cotton swab dipped in 10% honey solution mixed with protein X. Number of adults were counted based on the emerged hole left on the cocoons. Percentage of Adult emergence was calculated. Field release of emerged adults was done.

$$\text{Adult emergence (\%)} = \frac{\text{No of adults emerged} \times 100}{\text{Total no. of pupae}}$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biology of *Bracon brevicornis* (Fig 2):

EGGS: *B. brevicornis* laid maximum numbers of eggs on dorso-lateral side of 5th to 6th abdominal segments of host larvae. The eggs were loosely attached to the host's integument and deposited parallel to the longitudinal axis of the body. The freshly laid eggs on *C. cephalonica* were creamy white in colour and become translucent later. The deposited eggs were spindle shaped

slightly curved, hyaline colourless and loosely attached to the surface of the host body. *B. brevicornis* lays eggs on lateral side of the host body and eggs laid on all the segments except the first thoracic and the head region. Majority of eggs lay close to the intersegmental folds on the lateral aspect while some on the dorsal aspect. Pre-oviposition period is 1-2 days. Egg hatching period 1-2days, average fecundity was found to be 200-240 and number of eggs ranges from 44-45. Hatching percentage was found to be 89% and mortality percentage was 10.7% (Table 1).

GRUBS: The first instar was apodous, white, devoid of any sign of external segmentation and distinguished from the egg only by waves of internal content of gut contraction and the movement of haemolymph within the parasite's body. The later instar larvae were whitish yellow and having clear larval body segmentation. The full-grown larvae showed tapering end and bulging of middle portion of body. Complete developmental period of grub is between 2-4 days (Table 1).

PUPAE: Final instar larvae ceases feeding then search suitable place where it remains stationary this forms the beginning of cocoon formation stage. The cocoon of *B. brevicornis* was made loosely woven by silken threads and white in colour with oblong in shape and become tough attached with substrate. Pupal period is between 3-7days. Percentage pupation is 95% and mortality 24.5% (Table 1).

ADULTS: The newly emerged adults were black in colour with transparent membranous wings and bent head. The femur of leg is enlarged. The abdomen of females was bulged at anterior portion and sharp at posterior end with pointed ovipositor. The male abdomen differs from females due to short blunted posterior tip. The length of the male was shorter as compared to females. Antennae are filiform with 13 segments. Male lifespan is less compared to female. Adult life span was 23-40days. Percentage adult emergence 93.8% and mortality 6.2% (Table 1).

Table 1: Life Cycle Metrics of *Bracon brevicornis* :

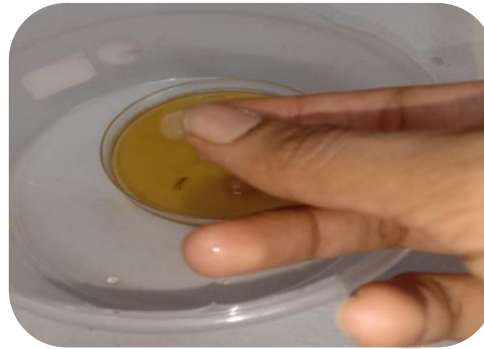
Parameters	Range (days)	Mean (days)
Incubation period	1-2	1.5
Larval period	4-5	4.5
Pupal period	3-7	5
Adult longevity	23-40	31.5
% Egg hatching	89.3%	-

% Pupation	95.8%	-
% Adult emergence	93.8%	-
Fecundity	200-240	-
No. of eggs	44-45	-
No. of larvae	40-42	-
No. of pupa	35-40	-
No. of adults	30-39	-

UNDER PEER REVIEW



1. Preparing honey solution



2. Dipping of cotton balls in honey solution and squeezing extra honey



3. Take a wide mouthed jar



4. Release 20 *Bracon* adults to the jar near light source as they are phototropic in nature



5. Cover the opening with a muslin cloth and tie it



6. Collecting *Corcyra* larvae



7. Add 10-15 corcyra bigger larvae on muslin cloth



8. Cover the larvae with a another muslin cloth, tie it & keep as it is for 2 days



9. After 2 days, transfer the parasitized larvae to the petri dish with a paper



10. Adult emerged

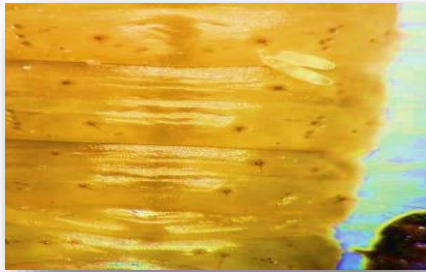


11. Emerged adults released in another container for mating purpose



12. Releasing *Bracon* adults on Maize plant

Fig 1. Laboratory rearing set up of *Bracon Brevicornis*



Eggs of *Bracon* on *Corcyra* larvae



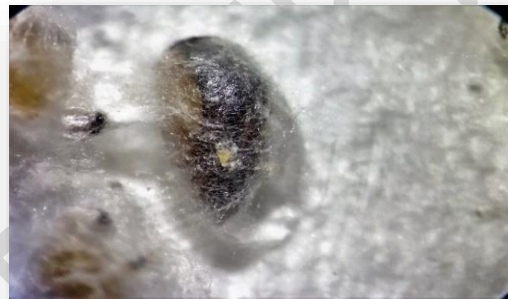
Early instars of *Bracon*



Late instars of *Bracon*



Pupa of *Bracon*



Pupa is ready to emerge



Adult of *Bracon*

Fig 2. Different life stages of *Bracon brevicornis*

CONCLUSION:

- ❖ In rearing of *Bracon* in laboratory we observed the high hatching and adult emergence percentage due to proper feeding and maintenance

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