

# Cabbage aphid

## Namibian crop pests # 70

*Brevicoryne brassicae* (L.).

Order: Homoptera

Family: Aphididae



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Colony of aphids on cabbage



Aphid colony

**Common names:** **Cabbage aphid** (English), **Ghushi** (Gciriku), **Plantluisse** (Afrikaans) **Omudjenene** (Oshikwanyama), **Oshizenene** (Oshimbalantu), **Oshikagadhi** (Oshindonga) **Omule** (Oshingandjera, Oshikolonkadhi, Oshikwaluudhi)

**Host:** The main host plant is cabbage, but they can be found on other members of the Cruciferae.

**Pest status:** Aphids are a major pest of cabbage and cauliflower in most areas where they are grown. Attacks are particularly severe in dry seasons following good rains. Radish, kale and most other Brassicas are attacked but less severely than cabbage; turnips appear to be immune.

Aphids are an important vector of many virus infections.

## **Description:**

Adults may be wingless or winged and are of medium size (1.6 mm – 2.8 mm). They are always covered with a fine grey, mealy, powdery wax, which covers the basic greyish-green to dull mid-green colour of the aphid. Only females are found and living young are produced. Cabbage aphids are usually found in colonies feeding on the underside of leaves.

The optimum temperature for development is 20°C, survival rate is decreasing when temperatures are rising above 30°C.

## **Damage:**

Masses of soft, mealy-grey aphids are found feeding in clusters on leaves sucking the sap from the plant. Infested seedlings may be stunted and distorted. White cast skins and drops of sticky honeydew and/or sooty mould growing on the honeydew can be seen on the leaves. Down-wards curling of the leaves occurs. All these symptoms affect the marketability of the cabbage heads considerable.

## **Control:**

### **Biological control:**

In Namibia no collection or identification has taken place to identify natural enemies of the cabbage aphid, although larvae and beetles of the ladybird have been seen feeding on the aphids in gardens in the Kavango Region.

In other countries natural enemies have been studied in great detail. Aphids are naturally controlled by parasitic wasps of the family Aphidiidae and Aphelinidae, predators (ladybird beetles and hover flies) and pathogens. The sweet honeydew often attracts ants. Ants are living in companion with the aphids; occasionally protecting them from predators.

### **Use of botanical pesticides:**

Most aphids can be controlled on smallholders' plots by washing the aphids off with lots of water. This species however is more difficult to kill as its body surface is covered with a fine wax, which is water repellent. Soap can be added to the water as an additional "wetter". Also cattle urine, left overnight in a bottle to ferment and diluted with water, has shown good results in aphid control.

Farmers in the Kavango region are using ash diluted in water and sprinkle this on the plants. It is believed that the alkalinity of the ash extracts fluids from the aphids and cause them to dry out.

### **Cultural practices:**

At present no resistant varieties are available, however glossy green-leafed cabbage lines with a low wax layer tend to be less susceptible.

### **Chemical control:**

Contact or systemic insecticides may be used in case of severe attacks. Spray applications should be directed to the underneath of the leaves where most aphids are usually to be found.

### **References:**

Keizer, M., J., Zuurbier, Manual of Integrated Pest Management Course for Extension staff, Mashare Agricultural Development Institute, Rundu, Namibia, April 1999.

Varela, A.M., A.A., Seif, Crop protection manual for Brassicas, ICIPE, Nairobi, Kenya, June 1999.

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