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FOLIAR INFECTIONS OF THE SACRED BO TREE AT ANURADHAPURA

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The Sacred Bo Tree at Anuradhapura (*Ficus religiosa*) now has a rather thin canopy and a study was made of foliar fungi which might impair its condition following the observation of necrotic brown lesions on some leaves.

Normally, the foliage of trees such as *Ficus* spp. is infected by several fungi generally not regarded as pathogenically important. Black crustations occur on the surfaces of leaves on the Sacred Bo Tree. They are produce by the fungus *Phyllachora ficum* which is not considered damaging. However, irregularly shaped brown lesions spreading inwards from the margin in some leaves caused concern. A diffused interveinal yellowing of the lamina was also observed.

Several isolations were made from affected leaves and the fungi indentified included the following: *Nigrospora sphaerica, Nigrospora* state of *Khuskia oryzae, Pestalotiopsis versicolor, Alternaria alternata, Phyllosticta religiosa, Fusarium semitectum, Curvularia lunata* state of *Cochliobolus lunatus* and *Colletotrichum* state of *Glomerella cingulata.*

While *Nigrospora* was the most common fungus produced in culture, *Phyllosticta* which causes a blight of leaves and *Colletotrichum*, a weak parasite, could be regarded as damaging to a tree in a state of low vitality. In plate assays, these fungi were found to be sensitive to fungicides such as Benlate (benomyl) and Delsene X (carbendazim + coordinated zinc ion and Maneb).

As the Sacred Bo Tree is in a state of low vitality, protective fungicidal spraying against the weakly pathogenic fungi was carried out in a programme to which the Deputy Director, Agriculture (Gardens), Mr. D. T. Ekanayake, gave leadership. The intensive attention that was given protected the Sacred Bo Tree during a period when it was subjected to considerable environmental stresses which increased its vulnerability to weak pathogens.