

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3551585>

Lac, *Kerria lacca* rearing on *Flemingia macrophylla* with NPK fertilizer: impact on plant growth, lac yield, and lac parasitisation

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Received: 22 September 2019; Revised submission: 06 November 2019; Accepted: 18 November 2019

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ABSTRACT: Lac insect, *Kerria lacca* Kerr. is the only commercial lac producing insect in the world. This tiny insect reared commercially on many specific host plants. Lac product is a natural resin of outstanding properties which is utilized in many products worldwide. Lac insects get settled on the host tree and take their nutrition continuously from the same part. Hence, additional fertilizer application becomes most important component for sustainable host plant growth and lac cultivation. Therefore, to determine the effect of chemical fertilizers (NPK) on *Flemingia macrophylla* and lac productivity, present study has been conducted. The result revealed that chemical fertilizer combination N₁₅:P₅:K₅ was found to be the best for *Flemingia macrophylla* growth which gives best lac yield and least pest infestation on *Kerria lacca*. The correlation study has also proved that NPK has positively influences on plant growth and lac productivity.

Keywords: *Flemingia macrophylla*; *Kerria lacca*; Soil nutrient; Parasitoids; *Eublemma amabilis*; Predator; Bhalia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kerria lacca Kerr. (Hemiptera: Coccidae) is also called as lac insect in the world and produces a natural resin. Lac resin is the only commercial natural resin of economic importance secreted by *K. lacca*, which has many outstanding properties; hence has demand throughout the world. Lac resin is a lac gland secretion of *K. lacca* which become hardened in contact with air [1]. Lac is considered as a minor forest produce but has significant contribution in tribal economy lac producing states of India [2]. India is leading lac producer and exporter [3] globally sharing about 60 percent world's lac production followed by Thailand [4]. Lac resin has versatile properties which make its high demand in electronic, food, medicine, cosmetics, furniture and many other industries [5]. The tribal communities of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are conventionally engaged in *K. lacca* rearing on natural host plants viz. *Ziziphus mauritiana*, *Butea monosperma* and *Schleichera oleosa*. A significant population reduction in these natural hosts has been observed in the past decades [6]; due to climatic and biotic factors; subsequently, lac production has also been declined drastically. Therefore, *Flemingia macrophylla* (Papilionaceae:

Laguminosae) (Willd.) Kuntze Ex Merr., has been introduced for *K. lacca* rearing. *F. macrophylla* is a fast growing perennial shrub of short height and produce tender shoots, easy to manage and showed great potential as a *K. lacca* host, has been utilized to sustainably increase in *K. lacca* rearing and lac production [7-10]. *F. macrophylla* was found to be a potential *K. lacca* host plant for its both 'kusumi' and 'rangeeni' strains [11-13]. *K. lacca* population loss due to insect predation was recorded about 40% [14] and due to parasitoids about 18.40% in kusumi and 26% in rangeeni strain [15] has been recorded. This loss caused by insect predator and parasitoids has been addressed by many means, but in this study emphasis has also been given to assess the effect of NPK on *K. lacca* insect predation and parasitisation in addition to plant growth and lac yield. It was recorded application of chemical fertilizer for better plant growth and development was found to be very effective. Subsequently, nitrogen fertilizer supply in host plants positively influence the sucking pest population, phosphorus gives indifferent effect, but potash recorded as negative impact on mealy bug population [16] and also of *K. lacca* [17], but no study has been undertaken to assess the effect of NPK on *K. lacca*.

Hence, to promote the *F. macrophylla* for *K. lacca* rearing and fetch a great lac yield, present study has been conducted with NPK application on *F. macrophylla*. NPK effect has been assessed on host plant growth, *K. lacca* shell development, lac yield and lac insect pest infestation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This experiment was carried out at research campus, Institute of Forest Productivity (IFP) Ranchi, India (Latitude 23°21'26"N, longitude 84°14'44"E). The seeds of plants were brought from IINRG, Ranchi, India and nursery was raised at the Institute of Forest Productivity. Environmental condition parameters viz. average temperature, relative humidity and rainfall of the lac cultivation period is presented in Table 1. The seedlings were planted at the distance row to row 1.5 m and plant to plant 1.0 m. The experiment was conducted in randomized block design (RBD) manner with nine treatments of chemical fertilizers N, P & K at different combinations viz. T1=N₅:P₁₅:K₅; T2=N₁₅:P₅:K₅; T3=N₁₅:P₁₀:K₁₅; T4=N₅:P₅:K₁₀; T5=N₁₀:P₁₅:K₁₀; T6=N₁₀:P₁₅:K₅; T7=N₁₀:P₁₀:K₁₀; T8=N₁₅:P₁₀:K₅; T9=N₅:P₅:K₅ and along with a control. Two months old twelve seedlings were planted in each treatment and were replicated thrice. Fertilizers treatment was applied in July and February months followed by irrigation twice in a year. All the recommended basic cultivation practice viz. irrigation and weeding [18] were done regularly. After one year, 'Kusumi' 20 gm brood lac per plant was inoculated in the month of July.

Table 1. Environmental parameters (average) of lac cultivation location (2012-2014).

Months	Temperature (°C)	Humidity (%)	Rainfall (mm)
July	27.11	74.14	385.00
August	26.31	77.97	564.33
September	25.00	70.00	638.83
October	22.10	63.17	529.50
November	18.73	63.17	268.67
December	15.18	56.17	274.50
January	15.14	56.67	405.33
February	19.05	55.83	410.50

Five plants were randomly selected and plant growth data was recorded at two months of interval till lac harvesting. Plant parts along with lac incrustation were collected at monthly interval and brought to the

laboratory and reared for predator *E. amabilis*, *P. pulvereae* and parasitoids infestation observation. Host plant was harvested at lac maturity in the month of February. Three randomly selected plants out of five selected host plant, encrusted with lac insects were recorded for lac yield. Subsequently, same harvested lac yields were used for stick lac and scrap lac yield observations. Twenty lac insect shells were randomly removed from four plants and weight have been recorded just before hatching of nymphs. Data was statistically analysis with one way ANOVA (analysis of variance) to down the result and significant differences were calculated at $P = 0.05$. To find out the relation among plant growth, lac yield and parasitoids and predator infestation, correlation analysis was done using the SPSS 21.0 statistical package.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of experiment recorded are presented in tables and described as follows:

3.1. *F. macrophylla* plant growth and lac yield

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that maximum growth of the host plant was observed (243.50 cm) in T₂=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ was significantly superior followed by T₃=N₁₅:P₁₀:K₁₅ (228.67 cm) over control (136.33 cm).

Table 2. Effect of chemical fertilizer on *F. macrophylla* and lac yield.

Treatments	Plant height	Brood lac yield	Stick lac	Scrap lac	Shell wt.
T ₁ =N ₅ :P ₁₅ :K ₅	216.89	502.11	115.09	20.13	0.0392
T ₂ =N ₁₅ :P ₅ :K ₅	243.5	659.33	127.36	36.25	0.0482
T ₃ =N ₁₅ :P ₁₀ :K ₁₅	228.67	533.94	102.01	26.36	0.0451
T ₄ =N ₅ :P ₅ :K ₁₀	220.00	448.72	95.79	20.90	0.0422
T ₅ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₅ :K ₁₀	197.17	399.22	86.02	17.02	0.0393
T ₆ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₅ :K ₅	209.78	387.44	83.77	14.74	0.0417
T ₇ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₀ :K ₁₀	202.72	597.33	136.7	24.34	0.0467
T ₈ =N ₁₅ :P ₁₀ :K ₅	210.39	420.83	85.75	14.35	0.0453
T ₉ =N ₅ :P ₅ :K ₅	202.94	368.78	84.97	16.89	0.0462
T ₁₀ = control	136.33	249.33	58.97	7.8	0.0322
SEM±	11.53	294.15	16.65	3.62	0.0031
CD at 5%	30.89	105.12	51.24	10.83	0.0091

Brood lac yield was found to be maximum (659.33 g/plant) in T₂=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ significantly higher, followed by T₇=N₁₀:P₁₀:K₁₀ (597.33 g/plant) over control (249.33 g), But, stick lac was maximum recovered in T₇=N₁₀:P₁₀:K₁₀ (136.7 g) followed by T₂=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ (127.36 g) over control (58.97 g). Scrap lac yield was maximum found in T₂=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ (36.25 g), followed by T₃=N₁₅:P₁₀:K₁₅ (26.36 g) over control (7.80 g). Lac shell weight was highest recorded in T₂=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ (0.0482 g) followed by T₇=N₁₀:P₁₀:K₁₀ (0.0467 g) over control (0.0322 g).

In this study, fertilizer combination supplied with maximum nitrogen and least phosphorus and potash has obtained the maximum growth. It seems that nitrogen increases the plant succulence, additionally, potassium application in soil increased water uptake and reduces dry matter per cent in plant shoot [19] and make the plant more succulent which favours lac insect feeding and growth. The findings of [20] confirmed that nutrient management of lac host trees increased the lac production. *K. lacca* insect has obtained the maximum yield [21] shell weight reared on *Zizyphus mauritiana* [22]; and in *F. semialata* applied with NPK

in combination [6]. Additionally, the findings of Burn [23] argued that, lettuce plant growth was positively related to N concentration while, K and P concentration was linearly related. In the same treatment plants has given the best brood lac, scrap lac yield and lac shell weight. This may be because of treatment supplied with maximum nitrogen which has made the plant more succulent and susceptible to the lac insects feeding. This finding of previous worker says that nitrogen fertilizer positively influences the plant growth and herbivores [24], nitrogen fertilizer which increases the survival ability of plant and to recover from herbivore feeding [25-27]. The increasing supply of N fertilizer in *Larrea tridentate* and other plants plant increases the amount of nutrients availability for insect and also increase the population of sucking insect pests [25, 28-30]. Similarly, increase in soluble nitrogen in leaf tissue, increases the fecundity and developmental rates of the green peach aphid, *Myzus persicae* [31] and leafhopper [32].

Increasing application of phosphorus fertilizer negatively influences the leafhopper population and reduces the sucking pest population in paddy [32-35]; mealy bug on and *T. telarius* mite population [16, 36]. Minimum level of potash supported the lac growth in my study this may be because potash fertilizer increases water intake and reduces the dry matter content in the plant and, similar to potassium at enhanced doses induced resistance to rice against leafhopper and negative effect of K was also noticed on *M. persicae* aphid and on leafhopper population in rice [34-36].

3.2. Predation and parasitisation on *K. lacca*

Table 3 revealed that minimum infestation of predator *P. pulverea* was recorded in T2=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ (1.87/4 cm), followed by T4=N₅:P₅:K₁₀ (2.00/4 cm) over control (2.89/4 cm). While, least infestation (non-significant) of *Eublemma amabilis* (1.53/4 cm) was recorded in T2=N₁₅:P₅:K₅, followed by T3=N₁₅:P₁₀:K₁₅ (1.58/4 cm), over control (2.00 larvae/4 cm). Chemical fertilizer nutrient combination T2=N₁₅:P₅:K₅ was recorded significantly least parasitoids infestation (11.06/cm), followed by T7=N₁₀:P₁₀:K₁₀ (12.78/cm), over control (19.94 parasitoids/cm).

Table 3. Effect of chemical fertilizer on predator and parasitoids of *K. lacca*.

Treatments	<i>P. pulverea</i> population/4 cm	<i>E. amabilis</i> population/4 cm	Parasitoids
T ₁ =N ₅ :P ₁₅ :K ₅	2.33	1.64	14.67
T ₂ =N ₁₅ :P ₅ :K ₅	1.87	1.53	11.06
T ₃ =N ₁₅ :P ₁₀ :K ₁₅	2.39	1.58	14.89
T ₄ =N ₅ :P ₅ :K ₁₀	2.00	1.86	15.78
T ₅ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₅ :K ₁₀	2.19	1.70	16.11
T ₆ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₅ :K ₅	2.18	1.71	15.17
T ₇ =N ₁₀ :P ₁₀ :K ₁₀	2.49	1.73	12.78
T ₈ =N ₁₅ :P ₁₀ :K ₅	2.38	1.83	14.89
T ₉ =N ₅ :P ₅ :K ₅	2.15	1.72	15.72
T ₁₀ = control	2.89	2.00	19.94
SEM±	0.23	0.27	1.63
CD at 5%	0.66	0.77	3.86

The similar findings were also recorded by Kumar [6] where it was revealed that fertilizer combination with more nitrogen received less parasitoids and predator infestation in lac insect. Similarly, increasing nitrogen doses suppresses the activity of parasitic wasps of cereal aphid was recorded [37] and negatively affected the predator/pest ratio [38].

3.3. Correlation study

Chemical fertilizer NPK application influences the plant growth, which was positively correlated (table 4) with brood lac yield (0.789), stick lac yield (0.672), scrap lac yield (0.800) and lac shell weight (0.788). Similarly, brood lac yield production showed positive correlation with stick lac yield (0.952), scrap lac yield (0.941) and lac shell weight (0.727), but negatively correlated with *P. pulvereae* (-0.482); *E. amabilis* infestation (-0.758) and parasitoids infestation (-0.932). Similarly, stick lac yield was positively correlated with scrap lac yield (0.835), shell weight (0.653) and infestation of *P. pulvereae*, *E. amabilis* predators and parasitoids was negatively correlated (-0.385); (-0.667) and (-0.888), subsequently. Shell weight was found to be negatively and significant correlation with *P. pulvereae* (-0.604), *E. amabilis* infestation (-0.621) and parasitoids infestation (-0.868), but the parasitoids infestation was found to be positively correlation with *E. amabilis* infestation (0.777) and *P. pulvereae* (0.631).

Table 4. Correlation between plant growth, lac production and insect pest infestation on *K. lacca*.

Correlation matrix	Brood lac	Stick lac	Scrap lac	Shell weight	<i>P. pulvereae</i> /4 cm	<i>E. amabilis</i> /4 cm	Parasitoids /cm
Plant height	0.789	0.672	0.800	0.788	-0.807	-0.801	-0.843
Brood lac		0.952	0.941	0.727	-0.482	-0.758	-0.931
Stick lac			0.835	0.653	-0.385	-0.667	-0.888
Scrap lac				0.709	-0.607	-0.795	-0.865
Shell weight					-0.604	-0.621	-0.846
<i>P. pulvereae</i> /4 cm						0.583	0.631
<i>E. amabilis</i> /4 cm							0.777
Parasitoids/cm							0

An experiment conducted for lac rearing on *F. semialata* resulted same correlation [6] and it has also proved that application of phosphorus, negatively influences the leafhopper population and reduce the sucking pest population in paddy [32-35].

4. CONCLUSION

Each organism on the planet need energy for their developments, similarly, plant fulfils their nutritional requirements from the soil for their survival, growth and propagation. Sometimes, soil become inefficient to supply required nutrient to the plant in this condition additional nutrient required to be apply in the soil in form of chemical fertilizer or other means. And, if any other insect is drawing food from the plant then, additional nutrient application become critical for plant survival. In this study, host *F. macrophylla* was grown with additional nitrogen, phosphorus and potash has obtained the maximum growth. But maximum lac yield was recovered in least P and K treatment. This may be due to effect of nitrogen, which increases the plant growth and made the plant more succulent and favorable for insect feeding. Subsequently, potash increases the water uptake and reduced the dry matter content in the plant. Hence, it may be recommended that rearing of *K. lacca* on *F. macrophylla* should be applied with additional NPK to get better lac yield and less *K. lacca* insect pest infestation.

Authors' Contributions: The first author is an entomologist and he has contributed the insect rearing and other lac insect related parameters while second author is a soil scientist and she has contributed the soil

nutrition and its effect on *Flemingia macrophylla*. Both authors wrote, read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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