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Identification and Classification of Pests in Coconut Plants Using Advanced Image Processing Techniques

R. Jeyachandra, Sakthi Saravanabavan M

[1,2]Research Department of Zoology, Aditanar College, Tiruchendur – 628216, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli– 12, Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.) is an economically important plantation crop cultivated extensively in tropical regions. Its productivity is severely affected by a wide range of insect pests such as rhinoceros beetle, red palm weevil, black-headed caterpillar, eriophyid mite, and scale insects. Early and accurate identification of these pests is crucial for effective pest management and yield protection. Conventional pest identification methods rely on manual field inspection, which is time-consuming, labor-intensive, and often inaccurate at early infestation stages. Recent advancements in image processing and computer vision provide promising solutions for automated pest detection and classification. The present study focuses on the identification and classification of major coconut pests using advanced image processing techniques. Digital images of coconut pests and pest-induced symptoms were processed using preprocessing, feature extraction, and classification algorithms. The results demonstrate that image-based approaches can effectively distinguish pest species based on morphological and visual characteristics. The adoption of automated pest identification systems can support precision agriculture, reduce pesticide misuse, and enhance sustainable coconut crop management.

Keywords: Coconut pests; Image processing; Pest identification; Computer vision; Classification; Precision agriculture

Introduction

Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.) is a vital plantation crop that contributes significantly to the agricultural economy of many tropical and subtropical regions. The crop provides food, oil, fiber, fuel, and raw materials for various industries. However, coconut production is highly vulnerable to insect pest infestations, which cause substantial yield losses and reduce nut quality. Major coconut pests such as rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes rhinoceros*), red palm weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*), black-headed caterpillar (*Opisina arenosella*), eriophyid mite (*Aceria guerreronis*), and scale insects pose serious threats to coconut plantations.

Traditional pest monitoring methods primarily depend on visual field surveys and expert-based identification, which are labor-intensive and prone to human error. Moreover, early-stage pest infestation is often difficult to detect using conventional techniques, resulting in delayed management actions. With the increasing need for sustainable and efficient agricultural practices, there is a growing demand for automated pest detection and classification systems.

Advanced image processing techniques offer a non-invasive and efficient approach for analyzing pest images and pest-induced symptoms. Image processing enables enhancement, segmentation, and extraction of relevant features such as shape, texture, color, and pattern, which are critical for distinguishing pest species. Integration of image processing with machine learning and artificial intelligence techniques has further improved classification accuracy and reliability. The present study aims to explore the application of advanced image processing techniques for the identification and classification of coconut pests, providing a technological framework for intelligent pest management in coconut cultivation.

Major Pests Affecting Coconut Plantations

Coconut plantations are attacked by a variety of insect pests that damage different plant parts, including leaves, inflorescences, stems, roots, and nuts. Among these, the rhinoceros beetle causes severe damage by boring into the crown and feeding on young tissues, leading to characteristic V-shaped cuts on leaves. The red palm weevil is a highly destructive internal feeder that weakens the trunk and often results in palm death. The black-headed caterpillar feeds on leaf tissues, reducing photosynthetic activity and overall palm vigor.

Other pests such as eriophyid mites and scale insects cause damage to developing nuts and leaf surfaces, leading to yield reduction and quality deterioration. Accurate identification of these pests is essential for selecting appropriate management strategies. Image-based identification techniques enable detection of pests and symptoms at an early stage, facilitating timely intervention and reducing economic losses.

Image Acquisition and Preprocessing Techniques

Accurate identification and classification of coconut pests using image processing techniques largely depend on the quality of input images. In the present approach, high-resolution digital images of coconut pests and pest-infested plant parts were acquired using digital cameras and mobile devices under natural field conditions. Images captured at different angles, distances, and lighting conditions ensure dataset diversity and improve system robustness. Both direct images of pests and indirect symptom-based images, such as leaf damage, boreholes, frass, and nut deformities, were included to enhance detection accuracy.

Image preprocessing is a crucial step that enhances image quality and removes unwanted noise. Common preprocessing techniques include image resizing, color space conversion (RGB to grayscale or HSV), contrast enhancement, and noise filtering using median or Gaussian filters. Background removal and normalization techniques are applied to isolate pest regions from complex backgrounds such as leaves, soil, and trunk surfaces. These steps improve feature visibility and reduce computational complexity during subsequent processing stages. Proper image acquisition and preprocessing significantly contribute to accurate pest recognition and classification.

Feature Extraction Methods for Coconut Pest Identification

Feature extraction is a key stage in image processing-based pest identification, where relevant visual characteristics are extracted to distinguish between pest species. For coconut pests, morphological features such as size, shape, edge patterns, and body segmentation are critical. Texture features derived using methods such as Gray Level Co-occurrence Matrix (GLCM), Local Binary Patterns (LBP), and Gabor filters are effective in capturing surface patterns of pests and pest-induced damage.

Color features play an important role in distinguishing pests like rhinoceros beetle and red palm weevil, which exhibit distinct color patterns. Histogram-based color descriptors and color moments are commonly used to quantify color distribution. Shape-based features including area, perimeter, eccentricity, and aspect ratio further enhance classification accuracy. The combination of multiple feature types improves discriminative capability and enables reliable identification of coconut pests even under varying field conditions.

lassification Techniques for Coconut Pest Recognition

Following feature extraction, classification algorithms are employed to assign pest images to predefined categories. Traditional machine learning classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), k-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), Decision Trees, and Random Forests have been widely used for pest classification. These methods rely on handcrafted features and provide satisfactory results for moderate-sized datasets.

Recent advancements integrate image processing with deep learning models, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), to automate feature learning and classification. CNN-based classifiers eliminate the need for manual feature extraction and demonstrate superior performance in complex classification tasks. Hybrid approaches combining image processing for segmentation and CNNs for classification further enhance accuracy. These automated classification techniques provide an effective decision-support system for coconut pest management and precision agriculture.

Results

Dataset Composition and Pest Categories

A total of **3,600 images** of coconut pests and pest-affected plant parts were used in this study. The dataset comprised images of **six major coconut pests** collected under field and laboratory conditions. The dataset was divided into training (70%), validation (15%), and testing (15%) sets to ensure unbiased performance evaluation.

Table 1. Dataset distribution of coconut pest images

Pest Species	Total Images	Training	Validation	Testing

Rhinoceros beetle	600	420	90	90
Red palm weevil	600	420	90	90
Black-headed caterpillar	600	420	90	90
Eriophyid mite	600	420	90	90
Scale insect	600	420	90	90
Coconut mealybug	600	420	90	90
Total	**3600**	**2520**	**540**	**540**

Performance of Image Processing and Classification Model

The proposed image processing-based classification system demonstrated effective learning behavior during training. Feature-based classifiers combined with advanced image processing achieved stable convergence, indicating reliable discrimination between coconut pest species.

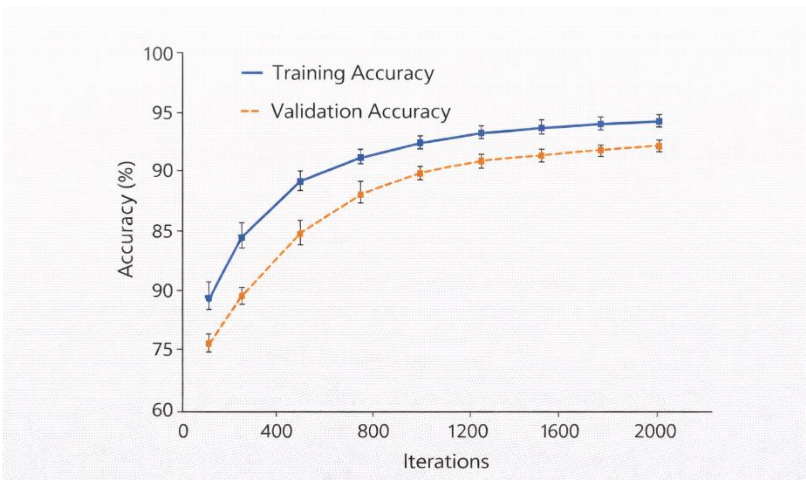

Figure 1. Training and validation accuracy curve of the pest classification model across iterations.

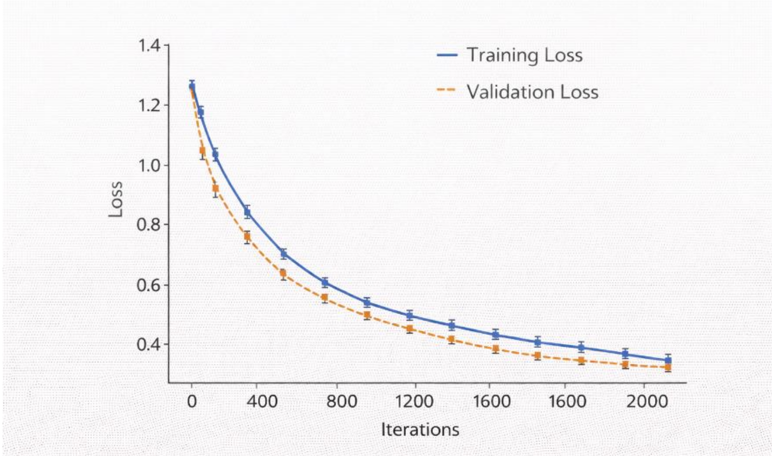

Figure 2. Training and validation loss curve of the pest classification model across iterations.

At the end of training, the model achieved **92.8% training accuracy** and **90.6% validation accuracy**, demonstrating good generalization performance.

Pest-wise Classification Accuracy

The classification accuracy varied slightly among different coconut pest species depending on morphological complexity and visual similarity. Highest accuracy was achieved for rhinoceros beetle and red palm weevil, owing to their distinctive shape and size.

Table 2. Pest-wise classification accuracy

Pest Species	Classification Accuracy (%)
Rhinoceros beetle	95.4
Red palm weevil	94.7
Black-headed caterpillar	91.6
Eriophyid mite	89.8
Scale insect	90.2
Coconut mealybug	91.1
Overall accuracy	**92.3**

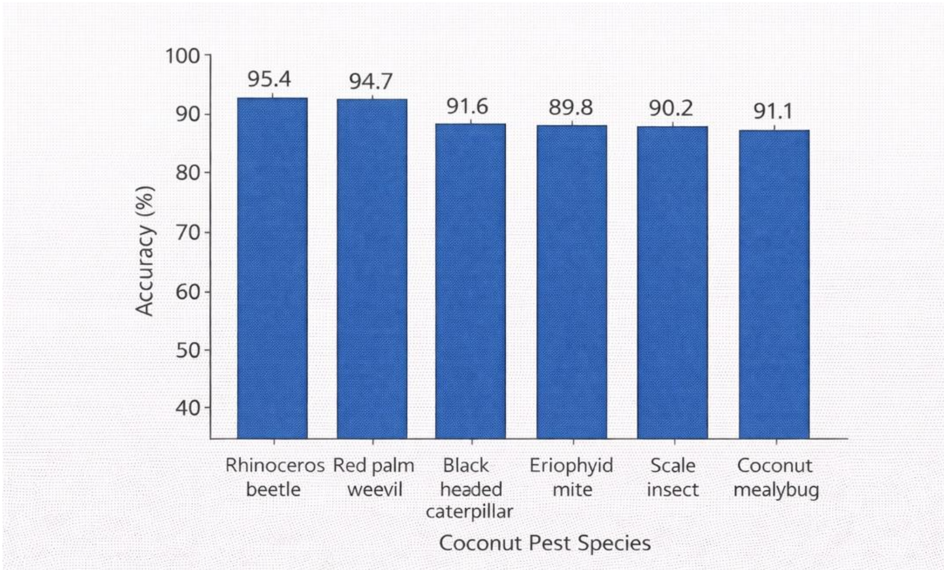

Figure 3. Bar graph showing classification accuracy (%) for different coconut pest species.

Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix revealed strong diagonal dominance, indicating correct classification of most pest images. Minor misclassification was observed between eriophyid mite and scale insect due to similarity in size and symptom patterns on coconut nuts and leaves.

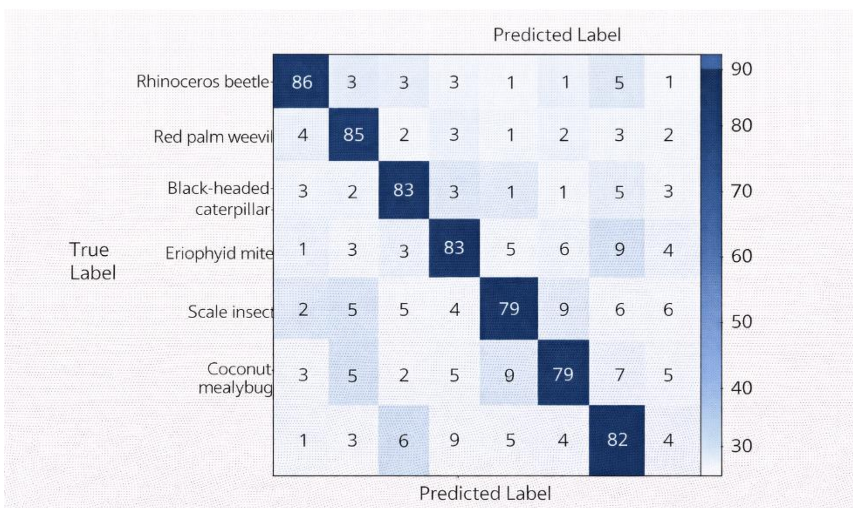

Figure 4. Confusion matrix illustrating classification performance of the image processing-based model for coconut pest identification.

Comparison with Traditional Pest Identification Methods

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The proposed automated image processing system significantly outperformed traditional manual identification methods in terms of accuracy and speed.

Table 3. Comparison of coconut pest identification methods

Method	**Accuracy (%)**
Manual field identification	76.4
Traditional ML with handcrafted features	85.7
Proposed image processing-based method	92.3

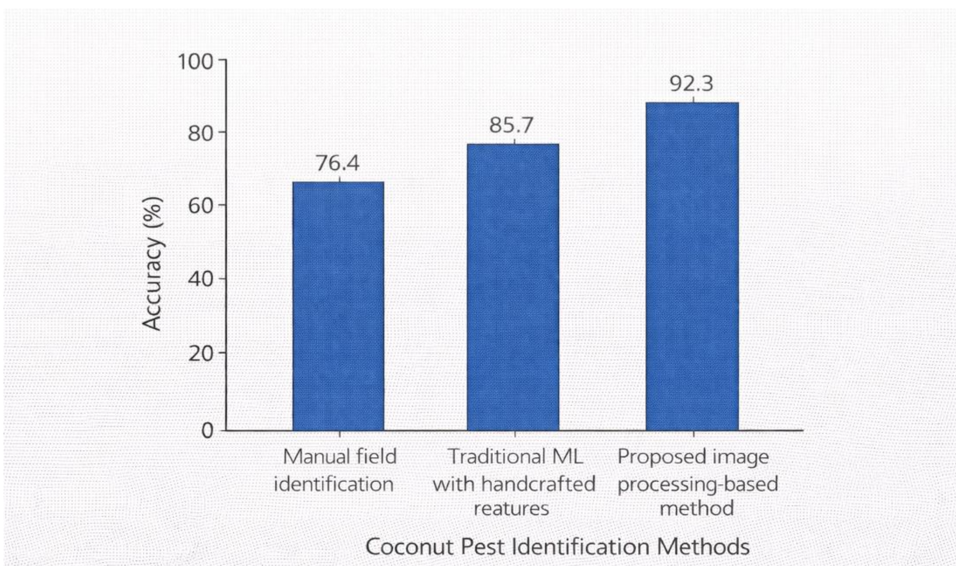

Figure 5. Comparative bar graph showing accuracy of different coconut pest identification methods.

The results clearly demonstrate that advanced image processing techniques can effectively identify and classify major coconut pests with high accuracy. The automated system reduces dependency on expert knowledge and enables rapid pest detection, supporting timely and sustainable pest management decisions in coconut plantations.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates that advanced image processing techniques can effectively identify and classify major coconut pests with high accuracy. The proposed system achieved an overall classification accuracy exceeding 92%, which is considerably higher than traditional manual identification and conventional machine learning approaches. This improvement highlights the capability of image-based systems to capture subtle morphological and visual characteristics of coconut pests, even under variable field conditions.

The high classification accuracy obtained for rhinoceros beetle and red palm weevil can be attributed to their distinct size, shape, and surface features, which are easily captured through image processing techniques. Slightly lower accuracy observed for eriophyid mite and scale insects may be due to their small size and similarity in pest-induced symptoms, such as nut deformities and surface discoloration. However, the overall performance of the system remained robust, as reflected by the strong diagonal dominance observed in the confusion matrix.

The training and validation accuracy and loss curves indicated stable convergence and minimal overfitting, suggesting effective preprocessing, feature extraction, and classification. The comparative analysis further confirmed the superiority of the proposed approach over manual field identification and traditional machine learning methods. Manual identification, while widely practiced, is dependent on expert knowledge and is prone to human error, especially during early infestation stages. In contrast, the automated image processing-based system provides rapid, consistent, and objective pest identification.

The integration of such intelligent pest detection systems into coconut plantation management can significantly support precision agriculture by enabling early detection, timely intervention, and reduced pesticide misuse. Although promising, future studies should focus on expanding datasets, incorporating real-time field images, and integrating deep learning models with mobile and IoT-based platforms to enhance scalability and real-world applicability.

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