

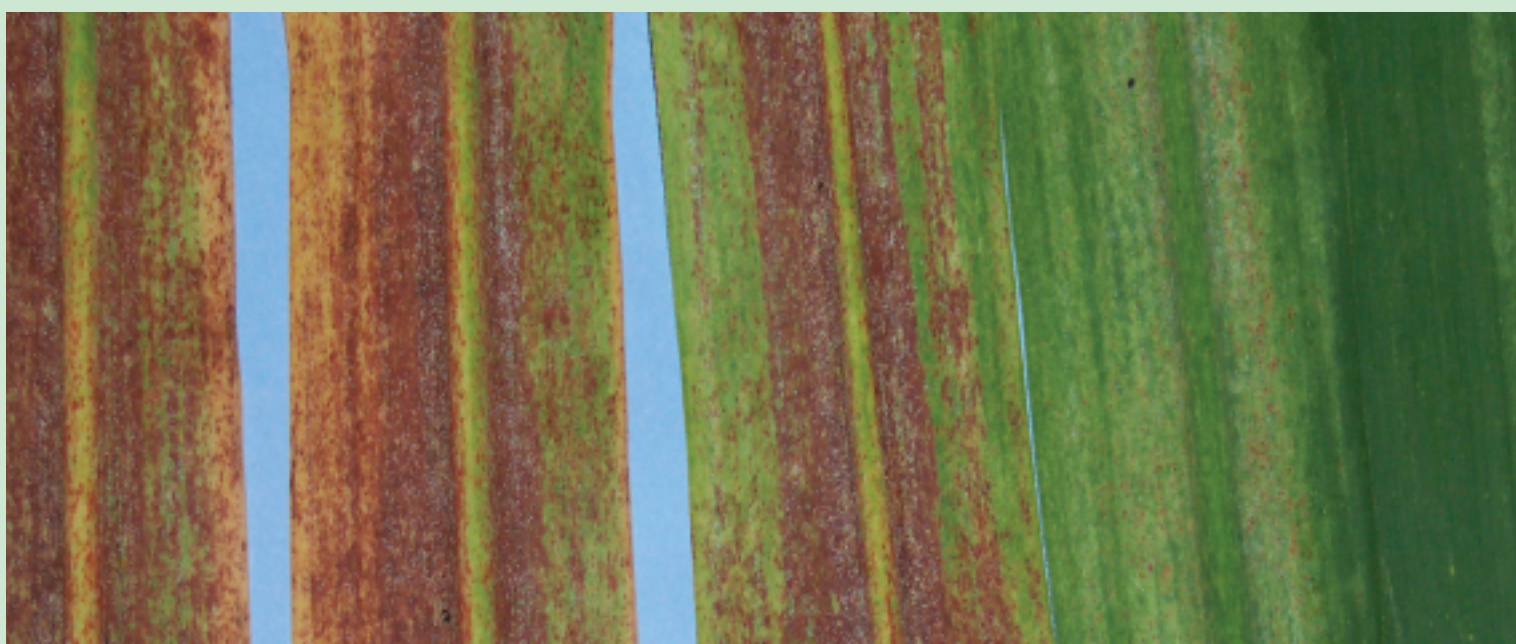
**B**SES Special Projects Manager, Dr Peter Allsopp, says that sugarcane symptoms, similar to those caused by orange rust, could actually be caused by a previously unident-ified species of mite.

In early 2001, infestations of mites caused marks on sugarcane leaves that appeared very similar to infection by the orange rust fungus. Initial examination of the mites showed them to be very similar to an overseas pest of sugarcane, a relative of the common red spider

# Mites and maybes

Walter, acarologists (mite experts) at the University of Queensland, has led to the recognition of this mite as a new species. It is, in fact, quite distinct from the overseas pest species. In describing the species, Beard and Walter got to choose the species name — *Oligonychus zanclopes* — which comes from two Latin words, *zanclo*, meaning a

leaf closely. If you remain in any doubt about whether the symptoms are actually caused by orange rust fungus, call your local BSES extension officer.



mite seen most commonly on broad-leaf plants.

The mite feeds under webbing on the lower surface of sugarcane leaves, causing yellow spots to appear on leaf undersides. Over time, these spots join together to form streaks, which become red. Red blisters are also produced on the surface of young internodes on the sheaths. Both of these symptoms result in a reddish-brown, corroded appearance, which is easily mistaken for orange rust.

Extensive examination by Doctors Jenny Beard and Dave

sickle, and *pes*, meaning a foot, and describes the shape of the feet of adult females.

We are unsure of the origin of this mite. All of the collections are from sugarcane and rice, both plants that were introduced into Australia. However, the mite is similar to other members of the group that are widespread on grasses in Australia, so it could be a native species that has shifted to feed on an introduced crop (as canegrubs have done with sometimes devastating effect).

If you find your sugarcane has symptoms similar to orange rust disease, take the time to examine the

Pictured above are different stages of mite damage. Over time, these spots join together to form streaks which become red.

Red blisters are also produced on the surface of young internodes on the sheaths. Both of these symptoms result in a reddish-brown, corroded appearance, which is easily mistaken for orange rust.