

FIRST REPORT OF *PAYSANDISIA ARCHON* (LEPIDOPTERA: CASTNIIDAE) ON *PHOENIX THEOPHRASTI*. A POSSIBLE ECOLOGICAL THREAT OF THE PALM TREE FOREST OF VAI, CRETE

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The Cretan Date Palm (*Phoenix theophrasti*) is a native species to the eastern Mediterranean. It is found mainly on Crete and southern Greece and in some Turkish coast. *Phoenix theophrasti* has a slow growing rate (much slower than *Ph. canariensis*), lower humidity levels in the trunk and many offshoots. Crete has probably the largest natural palm tree forest in Europe, the forest of Vai which covers an area of about 200 km². It consists mainly of *Ph. theophrasti* and it has a tremendous ecological value for Greece. Another, smaller, palm tree forest of Crete is the forest of Preveli, which also consists of *Ph. theophrasti*. *Paysandisia archon* (Burmeister, 1880) (Lepidoptera: Castniidae) that has been introduced accidentally to Europe (from Argentina), where it became a serious pest of palm trees. In the Mediterranean region, the pest has been reported in Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, and France. It goes through 9 larval instars with the 9th (prepupal) being the most destructive for the palm. *Paysandisia archon* was found in a single palm tree of the *Ph. theophrastii* species in the vicinity of the Technological Education Institute of Crete (Lat. 35.31688, Long. 25.105305). Three offshoots of this palm were totally destroyed by the pest, while the larva itself was found in the fourth one. Only one 6th-7th instar larva was found between the fourth offshoot and the main trunk. Although this can be characterized as an isolated incident, the risk of an infection of the Palm Tree Forest of Vai and Preveli with the unique *Ph. theophrasti* species exists.