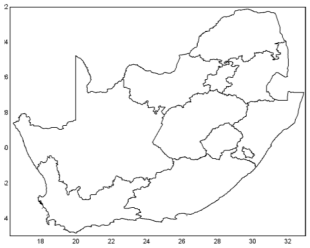

The pompom thrips, ***Liothrips tractabilis***, is native to Argentina. The insect was collected there on *Campuloclinium macrocephalum* (pompom weed) in 2005, and imported to South Africa where it was cultured and tested in quarantine to demonstrate that it is host specific (does not feed or lay eggs on any other plants), and is damaging to pompom. This was shown to be the case, and permission for its release was granted by South African authorities on 18 June 2013. The first insects were released at various sites in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and North West Provinces in the summer of 2013/2014. These releases are on-going and establishment will only be confirmed in the summer of 2014/2015. The distribution map will be completed as soon as this information is available.

DESCRIPTION

Adult pompom thrips are black (i) and measure only a couple of millimetres in length. They are strong and ready fliers. Immature stages of the pompom thrips are orange, with traces of black (ii) and are flightless. Eggs are light orange to yellow in colour, oval in shape, have bumps on their surface, and are laid around feeding areas on shoot tips and leaves. They are approximately half a millimetre in length, and are generally not observable with the naked eye.

LIFE CYCLE

Adult pompom thrips lay eggs either singly or in clumps on the stems and leaves of pompom (ii). They hatch after about 10 days at 25°C. The pompom thrips has three nymphal instars and two pre-adult stages. The nymphal period lasts approximately 11 days, while the pre-adult stage lasts about seven days. Egg to adult duration is about 28 days.

FEEDING DAMAGE

Both pompom thrips nymphs and adults feed on the stems and leaf tissue at the apical shoot tips of pompom weed. This causes deformities in plant growth (iii), which reduces its height, biomass, and flower production (iv). Although damage to the stem tips may encourage the plants to send out lateral branches in response, the rapid population increase of the agent ensures that the new shoot tips are also attacked, and these display similar damage. The thrips has greatest impact on seedlings, or on new spring regrowth.

IMPACT ON POMPOM WEED

Biological control represents the only long-term, sustainable solution for controlling pompom weed. It is hoped that the pompom thrips will combine synergistically with the already present pompom rust to manage this weed. With its high reproductive rate and ability to disperse, the thrips should have a marked impact on its target.

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