

Pereskia stem-wilter

Biological control agent against *Pereskia aculeata*

Pereskia

Pereskia (*Pereskia aculeata*) is an invasive alien plant that was introduced into South Africa from Brazil. It is problematic in South Africa because it destroys indigenous biodiversity by outcompeting indigenous plants. Areas infested with Pereskia become degraded ecosystems with very low levels of biodiversity.

Pereskia stem-wilter

The Pereskia stem-wilter (*Catorhintha schaffneri*) is a biological control agent against Pereskia. It is an insect that naturally occurs in Brazil where it feeds exclusively on Pereskia. Host specificity testing has confirmed that the stem-wilter can only survive on Pereskia. Eggs are black-brown and laid in batches of up to 30 on any rough surface. The tiny nymphs (less than 2mm in length) are first red but turn black after a few hours. The nymphs cannot fly but are very active and seek out Pereskia shoot tips to feed on. The nymphs go through four moults over a period of about 22 days before they reach the adult stage. Adults can fly, are about 13mm in length and are yellow and brown in colour.

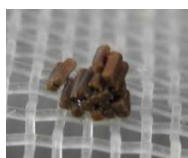


Pereskia stem-wilter adults on a tip they have killed



A Pereskia stem-wilter nymph

The life-cycle of the Pereskia stem-wilter



Eggs (14 days)



Recently hatched nymphs



Older nymphs



Adult

Feeding damage and impact

The feeding of the Pereskia stem-wilter kills the shoot tips of Pereskia and often causes them to split or rot. The plant will produce more shoots from below the damaged area but these will also be eaten and destroyed. With the constant damage that the stem-wilter inflicts on Pereskia the indigenous plant species will slowly replace the Pereskia over time resulting in a healthier ecosystem.

Safety

The stem-wilter can only survive on Pereskia and will therefore have no impact on other plant species or crops.



A shoot tip killed by stem-wilter nymphs and adults

For more information please contact Iain Paterson at

I.Paterson@ru.ac.za

or

Pereskiabiocontrol@gmail.com



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA