Northern Territory Government
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

MEDIA RELEASE

Arch Rival For Mimosa

The invasive weed *Mimosa pigra* has an enemy in the form of a small, leaf-feeding moth.

This seemingly insignificant moth, *Macaria pallidata*, has a significant role to play and it is due to its larvae, also known as caterpillars that feed on Mimosa leaves.

Mimosa is one of the worst weeds of a number of tropical countries and is well established as one of the worst weeds of the Northern Territory, where it is a declared Weed of National Significance.

It has now been found in Queensland and if it was to establish it would pose a severe threat to a number of industries and the wetland areas of the humid and sub-humid tropics.

Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts biological control officer Vanessa McIntyre said the moths lay their eggs on the leaves, giving caterpillars immediate access to their food source.

Ms McIntyre said recent laboratory studies have indicated these leaf feeding caterpillars can have an important effect on the size and vigour of Mimosa plants.

“Without effective control this weed could spread throughout the Top End of the NT and into the tropical areas of Western Australia,” Ms McIntyre said.

“Recent surveys have provided the strongest evidence yet that this tiny moth will be a key weapon in the biological control of Mimosa.

“This biocontrol program, supported with $420,000 from the Natural Heritage Trust and the Australian Government’s ‘Defeating the Weeds Menace’ program, as well as significant support from the Northern Territory Government, is a crucial part of the ongoing fight against Mimosa.

“*Macaria pallidata* was first released in the Northern Territory in 2002 following extensive testing to ensure it could not feed on any other plants.

“More than 30,000 moths have since been bred and released in the Adelaide and Finniss and Daly river catchments.

“Although survival was disappointing initially the latest data indicates that the leaf-munching moth is spreading very quickly.

“We didn’t think the moth would survive at first because ants and spiders were eating the caterpillars but in recent surveys we found that the moth has been surviving and breeding at most of the release sites.

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Edwin Edlund 8999 6266 Mobile: 0437 915 366

“Not only has it established where it was released but the moth has been found more than 50 kilometres from the nearest release site.”

A rearing and release program for another similar moth, *Leucris fimbriaria*, commenced earlier this year and it is hoped this moth will be another successful weapon in the fight against Mimosa.

“Hopefully these moths will help reduce Mimosa’s dense, impenetrable thickets, which can grow four to five metres high,” Ms McIntyre said.

“These tiny moths join a crew of six other established agents which have been released in the fight against Mimosa including two stem boring moths, a seed eating beetle, a beetle that feeds on roots, seedlings and leaf tips and a weevil that damages flower buds and leaves.

“If Mimosa is brought under control, accessibility to water for stock, irrigation and recreation purposes will improve.

“Pastures will also benefit if Mimosa is stopped in its tracks.

“It will no longer smother the land and reduce the available grazing area.

“Native plants and animals can also regain a foothold, halting the loss of biodiversity.”

Media Note _ For more information contact Vanessa McIntyre 89992266.

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Captions:
Macaria larvae
Macaria adult

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Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts
Edwin Edlund 8999 6266 Mobile: 0437 915 366