

Mr. Dean Knuth forwarded an article to me by e-mail, which I think is appropriate to pass on to our SVCA members, with some minor editing. - Mike Seiler, SVCA Board President

Since there are so many Canary Island Date Palms in Bonita, I thought that you would like to know about the invasion of the South American (black) Palm Weevil that is hitting us hard. There was an article on it a few weeks ago in the south bay section of the Union Tribune, but they had no solution to the problem.



The weevil is 1.5 inches to 2 inches long, is shiny black, and flies from tree to tree. It targets Canary Island date palms but also goes for avocados and citrus trees. The weevil crossed from Mexico to Chula Vista and Bonita in the past few years, but the invasion is enormous now. Hundreds of the palms have died and it is especially bad in the Sweetwater river valley. You see trees with flat tops where the new fronds have died and then the entire tree dies. (Palm trees grow from the inside out and when the newest palms die, the entire tree will die.



The weevil flies into the crown of the palm and each adult lays 500 eggs there and which eventually become larvae which then eat into the top fronds. The larvae become two inches long and kill the trees because palms can't live without the new fronds in the crown of the tree. They then build a cocoon in the branches and become pupae. When they come out as black weevils, they lay more eggs before leaving and then find the next tree to lay eggs in. The larvae can kill the tree in about one month, so it often is too late by the time you see the fronds sag. The fronds start to sag as the base of each is eaten by the larvae creating a sawdust and then the fronds flatten.



The County and State are reported to be only tracking its migration. U.C. Riverside is studying the problem, but has no solutions. Experts have yet to find a local predator, although in Brazil there is a nematode that kills them. County's response to an inquiry by Mr. Knuth was that they felt it was too late to control this weevil in Bonita and Chula Vista.

The treatment is spraying the crown with a pesticide called Merit. Only licensed sprayers can use Merit insecticide, and Mr. Knuth only found one company who would treat trees: Agricultural Pest Control Services in Lakeside, (619) 894-8880.

The company had him first cut away old fronds to the crown on the least noticeable side of the palm and pull-out and clean-out the damaged fronds which were full of larvae. Then they came in and doused the crown with Merit. They will come back in May when this type of palm has maximum water column uptake and treat the crown again and put another product into the base of the tree to be sucked-up during the max uptake period. Merit should protect the palms.