

Flies released in the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

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WPTV NewsChannel 5

There are a few more flies in the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. They were released Friday morning to fight a battle for bromeliads.

The University of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District have put aside pesticides and are using flies as a biological control agent.

The hope is to save twelve species of the bromeliad, a plant in the pineapple family. Bromeliads support insects and are very valuable in the Wildlife Refuge and in the Everglades.

"It's a great 'win win' for the Everglades and people of South Florida," says U.S. Rep. Ron Klein, (D) 22nd District.

This 'win win' event was brought on because Florida is quickly losing a lot of its native bromeliads and losing them to the Mexican Bromeliad Weevil.

"Most people call it an evil weevil, yes," says University of Florida professor and entomologist Dr. Howard Frank.

It's in the same family as the boll weevil but the Mexican weevil is an environmental pest that lays eggs in bromeliad leaves.

"From the egg hatches a weevil larva which mines into the plant, mines out the stem,

that by killing the growing tissue of the plant kills the plant and it falls dead out of the tree," says Frank.

Fourth graders from Orchard View Elementary watched as Frank and his University of Florida team released over one hundred flies into the Refuge.

"A fly from Honduras whose maggots eat the larvae of the weevils," says University of Florida graduate student Theresa Cooper.

"They don't attack anything except weevil larvae that attack bromeliads," says Frank.

"It was kinda cool!" says Orchard View fourth grader Eddy Evenou.

"Because it helps our plants and we need our environment for the plants," adds classmate Jerrod Ferguson.

120 flies were released. There were 62 male and 58 female flies. The flies are named after Frank.

"'Lixadmontia franki' and nobody has yet come up with a common name for it," says Frank.

Fly releases have been made and will continue to be made in many other parks and reserves across the state.

According to the University of Florida team, the Mexican weevil has been found at different locations in 21 of Florida's counties.