

New flies released to battle the "evil weevil"

*Last updated on: 8/29/2007 4:00:47 PM by Marisa Brahney
© 2007 by NBC2 NEWS*

COLLIER COUNTY: Scientists released a new species of fly in the Big Cypress National Preserve on Wednesday and they hope it will help control an invasive insect that is threatening native plant life.

The target of the new flies are something experts call "the evil weevil." It attacks and kills Florida's bromeliad plants, many of which are endangered.

"I first started chasing this weevil in Broward County in 1991. I was horrified by what was happening," said Dr. Howard Frank, who is a scientist at the University of Florida.

But just two years later, in 1993, scientists discovered a new species of fly and they now think it could be the answer to the weevil infestation.

"I happened to find this parasitic fly and when we sent it to the specialists they said, "Hey! This thing is new to science!" said Dr. Ron Cave, who is a scientist at the University of Florida.

Dr. Cave and Dr. Howard have spent the years since learning everything about the flies. How to rear them, how they behave and - the big question - if releasing them into the wild will work to bring down the weevil population without attacking any other important wildlife.

The expectation is that the 108 flies released Wednesday will feed on weevil larvae like they did in the lab – knocking down the number of bugs feeding on endangered plants.

"I don't have a crystal ball to tell me that. I certainly hope it will, and I think there's a good chance," said Dr. Cave.

It will be a few weeks before they know for sure.

The two doctors had to get state and federal permits before they could release the flies. This is the fourth of five releases being conducted statewide.