

!New Pest Alert!

Melanterius* weevil on *Acacia mearnsii

Background

In January 2024, signs of pest attack were noticed in *Acacia mearnsii* plantations in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. Investigations by the TPCP Field Extension team and TPCP Diagnostic Clinic confirmed symptoms were due to feeding of a weevil of 3-5 mm in size identified as a species of *Melanterius*.

Symptoms

Small holes are present on the shoots and twigs. Swelling of the shoots starts around the entrance hole due to the growing larva and its feeding. Feeding within the shoots leads to cracking of the shoots, yellowing and dieback.



Distribution and prevalence

The pest has only been detected around Howick area in KwaZulu-Natal.

Origin

The weevil likely originates from Australia.

Identification

Based on DNA sequence data, the weevil was confirmed to be either *Melanterius inconspicuus* or a very closely related sister species. Five species of *Melanterius* have been purposely introduced into South Africa as biological control agents of various invasive wattle, feeding on the seed pods. The DNA sequences confirm that the collected specimens were not any of those species.

Biology and ecology

Melanterius weevils are seed feeders that lay their eggs and feed on wattle seed. It appears the collected species has undergone a feeding shift and is now infesting and feeding on young shoots and twigs of *Acacia mearnsii*. The weevils typically have one generation per year, coinciding with seed maturation. However, as the weevils are now infesting the shoots and twigs it is unsure how many generations can be sustained per season.

Ongoing and future investigations

Investigations are ongoing to confirm the species identification of the weevil and determine its distribution, and the impact of its feeding, on the tree.

Should potential infestations of this pest be observed, please contact Sandisiwe Jali (Sandisiwe.jali@fabi.up.ac.za). Please distribute this pest alert to spread awareness.