



# South West NRM News

## Three Rivers, Three Creeks.

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## New Paroo Trial Site for Coral Cactus Biocontrol:

Biosecurity Queensland are continuing to roll out the release of a biological control agent for coral cactus (*Cylindropuntia fulgida* var. *mamillata*), in the form of the nymph variety *Dactylopius tomentosus*. Following on from a release site in the Longreach region, Biosecurity Queensland staff recently visited Moama, a property in the Paroo Shire, and released the nymph on a severe infestation of coral cactus.

This field trial is the end result of extensive scientific research and laboratory experiments to ensure that this nymph only affects the target vegetation.



Above: The new trial site for Coral Cactus biocontrol at Moama.

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## Coral Cactus Biocontrol Continued...

The visible signs of the nymph are a white cobweb on the outside of the cactus leaf (cladodes). At the new Moama trial site, five pieces of host cladodes were placed in the infested area at specific locations. From these pieces of infested cactus, the nymph feeds on the host plant and its population rapidly increases. The property owner monitors this host plant and when it is severely infested, the property owner can physically spread more host pieces of cactus around the rest of the affected area.



Above: A Coral cacti cladode infested with *Dactylopius tomentosus*.

The nymphs are also able to be spread by the wind, due to their small size. Whilst small, the nymph is very robust and is able to withstand a surprisingly wide range of environmental conditions, transport and handling. Ideal laboratory conditions for breeding are 25 degrees: under these conditions, a small potted cactus plant approximately 30 cm was exposed to the nymph. The nymph population increased and covered the plant, causing it to die within 8 weeks. The larger the plant, the more biomass the nymph needs to eat, and therefore it takes longer for the nymph to kill the plant.

The initial release sites will be closely monitored over the next 8 to 12 weeks until the host plants are infested, and infested cladodes are able to be spread through the rest of the infestation on the property. It has been estimated that it will take 12 to 18 months before there is a significant noticeable impact of the overall health of the coral cactus in the area.

This method of biocontrol is another tool to consider when controlling coral cactus on your property. Whilst it is a cheaper option compared to chemical or mechanical control, it has a longer timeframe before it has an impact on the coral cactus. It is recommended that this method is used in conjunction with other methods of control as part of an overall property weed management plan.



Above: An infested piece of Coral Cacti (circled) in a large plant at the Moama trial site.

If you believe you have coral cactus on your property and would like to register your interest to receive more information about use of biocontrol nymphs, please make contact with Jed Sommerfield at South West NRM on [jpo@swnrm.org.au](mailto:jpo@swnrm.org.au).

For further information about coral cactus, please visit <http://www.weeds.org.au/cgi-bin/weedident.cgi?!=plant.tpl&card=S33>.