

THE PERESKIA FLEA BEETLE

(*Phenrica guérini*)

A Natural Enemy of

PERESKIA (*Pereskia aculeata*)

in South Africa

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DESCRIPTION

The beetles are black with eight cream spots in their backs. They have large hind legs and so are strong jumpers when disturbed. They also fly. The larvae (young) are grub-like, growing to about one cm long and are yellow when small or grey when larger.

LIFE CYCLE

The red eggs are laid in groups of about 28 on the lower surfaces of the leaves. They hatch after 6 to 8 days and the larvae then have three consecutive developmental stages (called instars) taking a total of 23 days to mature. The third instar does not feed for one to three days just before pupating. During this time the larvae drop off the plant and pupate in the top 3cm of the soil. The new adult flea beetles emerge or hatch between 9 to 14 days later. The adults begin to lay eggs when one to two weeks old and can live up to six months.

FEEDING DAMAGE

Both the adults and larvae feed on the pereskia leaves, forming large holes. Feeding sites are surrounded by pieces of dark brown faeces.

IMPACT ON PERESKIA

As the population of the beetles increases, damage to the weeds is expected to reduce the weeds canopy and size of the weed mat allowing other desirable plants to grow. Reduction in mat size will also reduce the cost of conventional control methods



Adult flea beetle



Flea beetle egg packet on a leaf



Flea beetle larvae feeding on a leaf



Damage caused to a pereskia leaf by the feeding flea beetle larvae



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE. PHONE: Weedbuster Toll-free Helpline: 0800 005 376
WEBSITE: PPRI website is located via links from the Agricultural Research Council website: www.arc.agric.za

