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Department
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State of Hawaii

NEWS RELEASE

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Release of Biocontrol Agent to Control Ivy Gourd

The Hawaii Department of Agriculture will be releasing a weevil to control an aggressive, lowland vine called the ivy gourd. The initial release of the beetle *Acythopeus cocciniae*, commonly known as the ivy gourd leafmining weevil will be made tomorrow at Makiki Heights.

Ivy gourd is a pesky vine that covers and dominates the lowland landscape throughout Oahu, as well as Kailua-Kona and Napoopoo near Kealahou Bay on the island of Hawaii. Because of its extremely aggressive nature, ivy gourd has been designated as a noxious weed. This vine forms a dense canopy smothering trees, shrubs, hedges, and even structures including walls, fences, and utility poles.

Ivy gourd can be distinguished by its five-point, palm-shaped leaves, or its star-shaped white flowers that give way to small pickle-sized cucumber-like fruits that eventually turn scarlet in color.

The larvae of the leafmining weevil mine through leaves, while adults feed on the leaves producing a "shot-hole" appearance. Through defoliation, the ivy gourd vine is weakened reducing its growth ability.

This beetle is the third of three beneficial insects approved for release to contribute to the eventual control of ivy gourd. The department's exploratory entomologist collected five potential biocontrol agents in East Africa, as part of a biological control effort that was launched in 1992. After several years of extensive and intensive studies and tests, one moth and two weevils were found to be specific to ivy gourd, only surviving or attacking the ivy gourd plant.

In 1996, the ivy gourd vine borer, *Melittia oedipus*, was released in ivy gourd infestations throughout Oahu. Larvae of this moth tunnel in ivy gourd vines. The release of the ivy gourd gall weevil, *Acythopeus burkhartorum*, was made in Waimanalo on August 27, 1999. To date a total of 750 adults have been released in Waimanalo and Mokuleia, and galls have already been observed on the ivy gourd vines at the release sites. This biocontrol agent will stunt the ivy gourd vine. The newest biocontrol agent being released tomorrow will now attack the leaves of the ivy gourd. Combined, these "good" insects will work to weaken the vine and its ability to overtake plants growing at low elevations.

To prevent the further spread of this noxious weed, no part of the ivy gourd should be transported from infested areas (Oahu and Kona, island of Hawaii) to uninfested areas (Kauai, Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and parts of the island of Hawaii). Although small infestations were found on Kauai and Maui, early detection and fast action resulted in the eradication of this noxious weed from these islands.

Ivy gourd was first discovered in Hawaii in the Punchbowl area of Honolulu, in 1968. It is believed by some that ivy gourd was introduced to Oahu as an ornamental plant and was spread throughout the island by the bulbul bird. The weed probably made its way to neighboring islands with the movement of plants, seeds, or other propagative plant parts by people who use ivy gourd for food.

Representatives of the media are invited to a photo opportunity of the leafmining weevil release that is scheduled for November 17, 11AM, weather permitting. Meet at the entrance to the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife Baseyard, 2135 Makiki Heights Drive. If you will be attending, please contact Ann Takiguchi at 973-9560.

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