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Pink flies help fight fruit pest

If you have recently seen pink flies in Yarrawonga then no, you are not seeing things.

In response to the recent Queensland fruit fly outbreak in the town, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has undertaken an extensive eradication program, including the release of dyed pink sterile fruit flies.

DPI Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) Officer Jodie Dickson is in charge of rearing large numbers of sterile fruit flies at DPI's newly-built Tatura facility.

"On maturity, the sterilised flies are released into the outbreak area, where they outnumber the wild fruit fly population," Ms Dickson explained.

"After mating with the sterile flies, the wild female flies do not lay viable eggs and the breeding cycle is broken.

"To help officers differentiate between sterile and wild fruit flies, the sterile flies are dyed pink."

Yarrawonga lies within the Fruit Fly Exclusion Zone (FFEZ) and the eradication campaign is conducted to prevent the pest from spreading to major horticultural production areas.

DPI Plant Standards Program Manager Bill Ashcroft said for this outbreak, two control methods were used.

"An extensive chemical baiting program was run in conjunction with the release of sterile fruit flies" he said.

"Households in the immediate area of the fruit fly detection were baited on a weekly basis using a registered organic product which targets fruit fly and is non-toxic to humans and animals.

"Following this, up to two million sterilised flies were released per week over a period of several weeks."

Mr Ashcroft thanked the residents of Yarrawonga for their cooperation in the eradication program, which had proved successful.

"Although we have caught lots of sterile pink male flies in our monitoring traps, we have not detected any further wild flies since the start of the eradication program," he said.

Residents are encouraged to continue their own fruit fly control programs by looking after host fruit trees - pruning them regularly to make fruit picking easy, removing ripe fruit, collecting fallen fruit immediately and removing any unwanted fruit trees - and not removing home-grown fresh fruit from their properties.

Further information about fruit fly is available on the DPI website at www.dpi.vic.gov.au or by contacting the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

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