

Clover Flea



Adult Clover Flea

Introduction

Clover flea (*Sminthurus viridis*) is present throughout New Zealand and is a particular threat to white clover and lucerne in parts of New Zealand, particularly Northland, South Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. Clover flea is also referred to as the lucerne flea, and as springtails.

Identification

Clover flea can easily be seen with the naked eye as they grow up to 4 mm long. The adults are a dumpy looking, soft-bodied and wingless creature of varied colouration. The larger specimens (2-4 mm) are generally a greenish-yellow colour with irregular dark patches. Nymphs are smaller but otherwise similar to adults.

Life cycle

Adult females lay very small cream coloured eggs loose on the soil surface. These hatch within 8 days when conditions are suitable. The eggs hatch into small nymphs and develop through 5-7 stages to adulthood. The life cycle is very rapid, ranging from 3 to 5 weeks. They can be present all year round. Clover flea aestivates (hibernates) as eggs in hot summers.

Damage

Clover damage appears as white or pale flecks on the leaf. Under severe attack leaves appear white, because all green tissue is removed from the leaf leaving a transparent skeleton. This reduces clover productivity and persistence in some situations. Clover is generally made unpalatable to livestock by clover flea attack.

Prevention & management

Clover flea can be successfully controlled using a range of products such as Chlorpyrifos 48 EC, Lorsban 50 EC, Diazinon 800 or Dimilin 25W.

Clover flea can be controlled by using insecticides to kill the adults and/or using an insect growth regulator to eliminate juveniles. Some white clover cultivars have been selected for improved tolerance to this pest. The recommended threshold is 200-500/6 metre pasture sweep. The recommended sampling technique is to use a .3 metre wide sweep net and sample once every pace for 6 paces.

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