

HIERACIUM PLUME MOTH

Oxyptilus pilosellae

The history of hieracium plume moths in New Zealand

The hieracium plume moth is native to Europe and it was first imported from Switzerland by Landcare Research, in association with the Hieracium Control Trust in 1996, with the first release made in 1999. Due to difficulties in rearing the moth it has only been released at the one site so far and is not thought to have established. It is uncertain whether it will be possible to make any further attempts.

What do hieracium plume moths look like and what is their life cycle?

The adult moths are generally dark brown and white in colour. Their hind wings are distinctive as they are divided into three plumes, hence the common name. The moths lay yellowish-white eggs singly on the hairs of the upper leaf surface during summer. After a few days the eggs turn red and after about 2–3 weeks hatch into greyish-cream coloured caterpillars. The caterpillars spin some loose webbing at the centre of the rosette crown and burrow into the centre of the plant to feed. They remain as tiny caterpillars over the winter and put on a growth spurt the following spring. Towards the end of spring they pupate for nearly 2 weeks. The bright



yellow pupal cases are often webbed to the underside of the leaves and are made by scraping the leaf surface.

How do hieracium plume moths damage hieracium?

The caterpillars damage hieracium plants by grazing on the central buds, the root-crowns, and leaves of rosettes and stolons. Heavily damaged plants grow less, produce fewer flowers, and may even die.

Will hieracium plume moths attack other plants?

No, it is extremely unlikely that hieracium plume moths will attack plants other than mouse-ear hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*), king devil hawkweed (*H. praeltum*), field hawkweed (*H. caespitosum*), tussock hawkweed (*H. lepidulum*), and orange hawkweed (*H. aurantiacum*).

For further information contact:

Lindsay Smith
Landcare Research
PO Box 40, Lincoln 7640
NEW ZEALAND
email: smithl@landcareresearch.co.nz
Ph (03) 321 9805
Fax (03) 321 9998