



Bartomeu Escandell, the rural affairs councillor of the Formentera Council (CiF), together with Laura Pérez, operations manager of CiF Office of Agriculture, and Juan Argente, works technician at GRUPO TRAGSA, shared their assessment of the push to eradicate the red palm weevil from Formentera.

Escandell underscored a more than 23 per cent reduction in affected trees since 2015 and a one quarter drop in the total weevil population. The encouraging figures indicate that sustained efforts to wipe out the pest —the campaign is currently running a €46,000 tab, with €16k from the Govern and another €28k of the Council's money— is worthwhile.

That money has provided renewed steam to the measures that began in 2014 and helped cut costs (between €150 and €200 per tree) for private citizens treating palms affected by the pest. The response has turned on more stringent checks of imported trees, technical support for homeowners, practical training and professional consultancy, adjustments made to permit granting, preventive treatment on trees in public areas, tracking purchases from garden centres and an awareness raising campaign.

The response has also entailed field surveys, which have put the number of palm trees at 4,508 locally, as well as efforts to detect affected palms, monitor work of trained professionals and collect and dispose of associated waste not to mention maintaining traps to track population changes and carry out mass captures of adult weevils.

Traps and affected palms

In 2015, two-thousand twenty-one weevils were caught after traps were placed across the island as part of a four-month campaign. This year the efforts were extended across 12 months and ended in 1,721 insects being captured, or 22.5 per cent less than the previous year. As for the number of trees affected by the weevil, the 2015 figure of 159 stands against 122 affected this year — 23.7 per cent less.

The figures point to a turnaround in the trend of the pest's dispersal and a hampering of the

exponential growth for which it is known. The island's weevil numbers have slumped at the same time that costs facing owners of infected palms have fallen as well. In addition, the representatives highlighted improvements made in waste management at Formentera's rubbish tip.

Recommendations

The officials recommended continuing current efforts, intensifying them in spots where the pest is less pervasive and cordoning off areas of priority control in an effort eliminate the pest from them in the short term. Aside from recommending the traps be maintained in zones where the weevils are most prevalent, the officials pointed to the possibility of testing other types of traps as well, some of them commercially-available.