

# Pest of the month

## Buddleia weevil trial under way

Tasman District Council biosecurity officers undertook the first South Island release of the buddleia leaf weevil (*Cleopus japonicus*) at two sites in Tasman and Nelson in April. The weevil is a biocontrol agent for the purple-flowering buddleia (*Buddleia davidii*), a boundary control pest in the Tasman-Nelson Regional Pest Management Strategy.

This species of buddleia is a vigorous woody shrub. Its bright purple to mauve panicles have made it a popular garden plant that is very attractive to butterflies. However, its prolific seeding habit, its ability to establish on a wide range of sites and its rapid growth rates have seen it become a widespread pest. It is a problem for forest owners and is estimated to cost between \$0.7 million and \$2.5 million in control costs and lost production annually.

Buddleia grows on waste land in and around many quarries and its seed can easily be transported into new sites in gravel. Landowners need to take care in sourcing their gravel and be vigilant in managing any introduced weeds. It has also become well-established on terraces on a number of local rivers, restricting access and impeding water flow.

To date, herbicides have offered the most effective means of control, but the results are short-term and there is rapid regrowth from seed. A biocontrol agent offers the opportunity to reduce herbicide use, assisting with long-term control by feeding on buddleia leaves and slowing its growth.



*Buddleia leaf weevil, (Cleopus japonicus).*



*Purple-flowering buddleia (Buddleia davidii).*

The buddleia weevil had undergone a rigorous testing process over a 10-year period by Ensis (previously Forest Research) to ensure that it will not attack desirable species. It was cleared by ERMA for limited release in New Zealand in 2006. The first releases were undertaken at five sites in the Central North Island where it has been closely monitored. This work has been funded by the forest industry and central government, through the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology.