New records of *Gynaikothrips uzeli* (Zimmerman) (Thysanoptera: Phlaeothripidae) on *Ficus benjamina* in Texas and O’ahu, Hawaii, U.S.A.

In 2003, an exotic species of thrips, *Gynaikothrips uzeli* (Zimmerman, 1900) (Thysanoptera: Phlaeothripidae) was reported from infested leaf galls on weeping fig, *Ficus benjamina* L. (Moraceae), in five counties in Florida, U.S.A. *Gynaikothrips uzeli* was not thought to occur outside of Florida until several collections of leaf galls and adult thrips were made and confirmed as *G. uzeli* from containerized *F. benjamina* in the U.S.A. (AL, LA, MS, and TN) between October 2004 and January 2005 (Held et al. 2005). All but three of these new records of this thrips were coincident with recent shipments of containerized *Ficus* from production nurseries in central and southern Florida.

At present, incidence of *G. uzeli* in the U.S.A. is similar to that of a congeneric species, the Cuban laurel thrips *Gynaikothrips ficorum* Marchal, 1908. Both species are native to South-East Asia (Mound et al. 1995, Mound & Marullo 1996) and *G. ficorum* was accidentally introduced in the U.S.A. a little over 100 year ago (Denmark 1967, Mound et al. 1995). These species are morphologically similar; both are dark colored and range in body length from 2.5–3.5 mm. The two species can be differentiated by the length of the pronotal posteroangular pair of setae (Mound et al. 1995, Wheeler et al. 2006). Both are reported to inhabit leaf galls on more than one species of *Ficus* and can co-exist in the same leaf gall (Mound et al. 1995). Mound et al. (1995) suggested that *G. uzeli* is the primary gall inducer (i.e., folded leaf galls) on *F. benjamina*, whereas *G. ficorum* is the primary gall inducer (i.e., rolled leaf galls) on *Ficus microcarpa* L.f. *Gynaikothrips uzeli* is reported to feed on plant species unrelated to *Ficus* (L. Osbourne, personal communication), but *F. benjamina* is the only reported host on which *G. uzeli* can successfully complete its life cycle (S. Nakahara, personal communication).

Herbivores and predatory insects and mites have also been reported from galls induced by either *G. ficorum* or *G. uzeli*. Herbivores including scale insect crawlers, mealybugs (Coccoidea) and whiteflies (Aleyrodoidea) inhabit galls as inquilines (Tawfik 1967, Held et al. 2005). Held et al. (2005) cautioned that *Ficus* are hosts to other exotic herbivores and, once inside the galls, these herbivores may be inadvertently transported through commerce. In addition to herbivores, galls may host predatory thrips (i.e., *Androthrips* spp.), anthocorids (*Montandoniola* spp.), lacewing larvae (*Chrysoperla* spp.), spiders, and hymenopteran parasitoids (Tawfik 1967). Serendipitously, the spread of *G. uzeli* across the southeastern U.S.A. facilitated the spread of a minute pirate bug (*Montandoniola moraguesi* Puton, 1896), and the eulophid wasp, *Thripastichus gentilei* (del Guercio, 1931) (Held et al. 2005). Both specialize on gall-inducing thrips (LaSalle 1993, Dobbs & Boyd 2006).

On 24 August 2005, a sample of 21 galls, folded evenly along the midvein, was collected from four *Ficus benjamina* grown in containers or in the landscape on South Padre Island, Cameron County, TX, U.S.A. Several others sites where *Ficus* was growing were also noted to have galls but these plants could not be sampled