The status of *Cactoblastis cactorum* in South Africa

Helmuth Zimmermann
Helmuth Zimmermann & Associates
P.O. Box 974, Faerie Glen, Pretoria 0043, South Africa

The decision in 1933 to release *Cactoblastis cactorum* in South Africa for the biological control of *Opuntia ficus-indica* was based on a cost-benefit analysis and accepted the risk of the insect becoming a pest on cultivated cactus pear cultivations. *C. cactorum* eventually played a significant role in the successful biological control of several of the close to twenty *Opuntia* invaders which are of both South and North American origin. Seventy years later the insect remains an indispensable tool for the continued suppression and control of these weeds. Policies are in place to encourage and protect this important biological control agent against polyphagous parasitoids that are introduced for the control of Lepidoptera pests. Life table studies showed that the efficacy of *C. cactorum* is severely affected by several key mortality factors including egg and larval predation. Parasitoids are not important in regulating populations in South Africa. The insect also shows clear host preferences within the introduced species in the subfamily *Opuntioideae*. It prefers the smaller *Opuntia* species as opposed to the large tree-like species. The chollas (*Cylindropuntia* spp.) are not preferred hosts. Control of *C. cactorum* in cultivated cactus pear plantations in South Africa is primarily through sanitation with or without chemical control. Carbaryl, Methidathion, Deltamethrin and Cypermethrin are registered insecticides for the control of *C. cactorum* in South Africa.