

Mile-a-Minute Update: the Cavalry Has Arrived!

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

In [Invasive Species Profile: Mile-a-Minute \(*Persicaria perfoliata*\)](#) – August 2011, we learned how a noxious, annual weed accidentally came to America and spread like wildfire. The article's conclusion discussed a biological control, a weevil (*Rhinoncomimus latipes*), to keep mile-a-minute in check. These highly selective insects only eat mile-a-minute without chomping on native species. According to Erin Stocksclaeder, Fairfax County Park Authority naturalist, the holes chewed into this weed's stems and foliage may not eradicate the plant but will help reduce the population and spread. Instead of directly killing mile-a-minute, the insect damage drains the plant's energy thereby reducing seed production. Following extensive research and testing, these tiny insects were released in 2009 in the following Fairfax County parks: Lake Accotink, Hidden Pond, Rocky Run, and Westfield. Unfortunately, the last site was herbicide-treated shortly after the release, so that population was never established without a food source. Field monitoring over the next three years at the three other locations confirmed initial success! Capable of spreading up to 16 miles per year, the miniscule beetle's range expanded across much of Fairfax County and into Arlington, where it was not set loose. Detected for the first time this year in some of Royal Lake's mile-a-minute patches, the weevil is now another arsenal at this Invasive Management Area site.



Figure 1. This *R. latipes* specimen from Wakefield Park in October 2013 is crawling on a naturalist's finger. It is likely a descendent from Lake Accotink Park's founding population. Unlike ticks, these weevils prefer staying on the host plant instead of crawling on people. Furthermore, ticks have eight legs and weevils have six.

For more on the mile-a-minute control program involving *R. latipes*:

http://www.accotink.org/Weevil_Release_2010.htm

<http://ag.udel.edu/research/biocontrol/mileamminute.htm>

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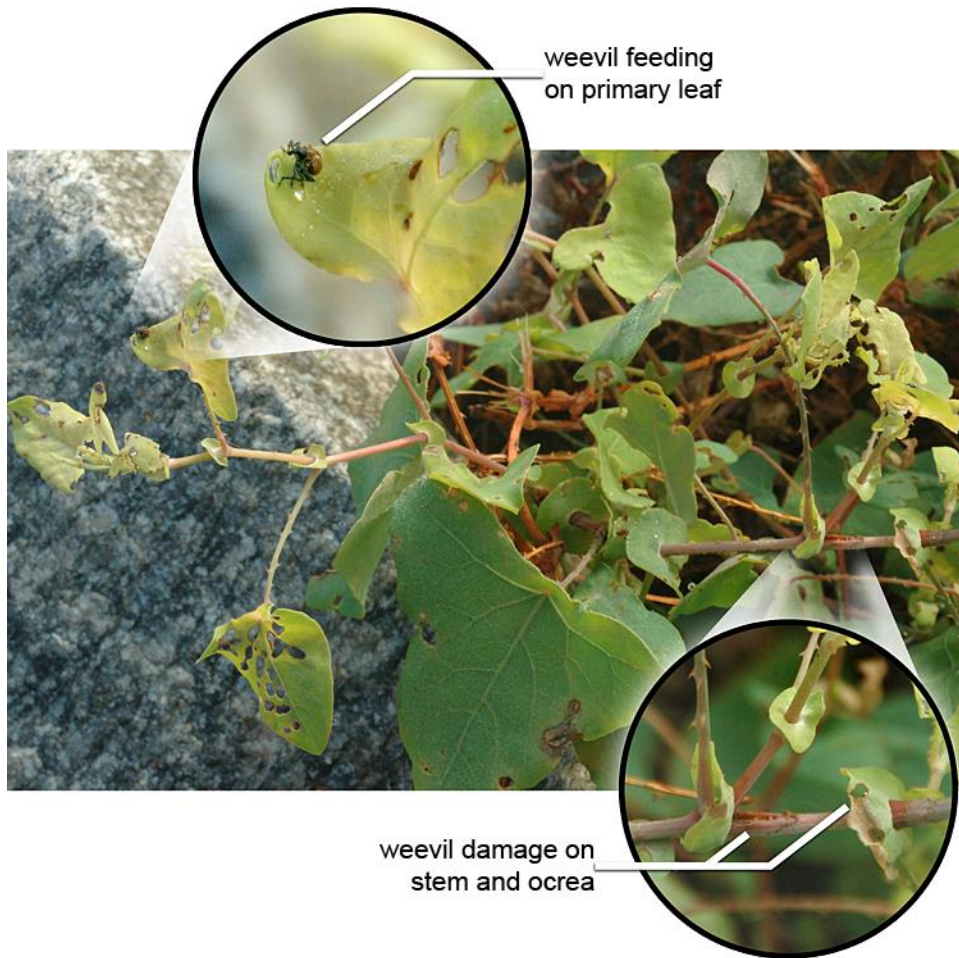


Figure 2. Most of the obvious holes in mile-a-minute leaves are caused by Japanese beetles—a notorious generalist herbivore preferring Asian flora and targeting far fewer American plants. Though Japanese beetles eat large holes in fleshy foliage, they avoid stems and the weed withstands the munching far better than weevil activity. This sickly mile-a-minute specimen at Royal Lake Park (photographed in August 2014) is subtly yet critically damaged by weevil feedings.

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