

The Formentera Council office of rural affairs shared today its data on the spread of the red palm weevil on Formentera. Department head Bartomeu Escandell highlighted the different strategies the administration has employed to prevent further spread of the insect. He also called for help from Formentera residents and asked anyone with a potentially infested palm tree to contact the CiF office of rural affairs, which offers help controlling the pests.

Escandell outlined the Council's plans – with assistance from the Govern Balear – to spend €42,000 in 2016 on pest control strategies for the weevil. That figure represents a €7,000 increase in the same funding in 2015. This year, efforts will begin in early March and continue to year-end – an extension of last year's campaign, which ran from July to December. As Escandell pointed out, «the change was based on the increase in the number of affected palm trees registered since 2014. That year the number was 98 and last year it rose to 178».

Juan Argente, project coordinator and specialist at Tragsa, explained the goal of this year's efforts are to carry on where work left off in 2015. «The strategy involves fieldwork to establish our working area and track which trees are affected, then close monitoring of the pest control work done by the professionals», said Argente, who indicated another component will include keeping a network of traps to oversee captures of large swathes of the weevil population.

Pickup and disposal at no cost for private homes

As a way to help private homes meet the cost of controlling the pests, Escandell explained the Council will be allocating more than 40% of the project's budget to the pickup and treatment of organic matter generated in the process. Another part of the current push is to target new cases introduced through garden centres here on the island, not to mention a campaign to raise local awareness. Training courses designed for local professionals will be given the first two weekends of March.

A total of 3,000 palm trees have been inspected since the first case of a weevil-affected tree was detected in 2011. Since that time, 280 affected trees have been treated. Argente noted that for pruning to be an effective preventive measure it must be done in December or January.