



## Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

### Seen any *Senecio jacobaea* lately?

Environment Canterbury biosecurity staff are asking landholders to keep an eye out for this pest plant, better known as ragwort, before it gets a foothold on the plains.

So far the Canterbury Plains have a low incidence of ragwort, but now because it is normally kept in check by grazing sheep, biosecurity staff at Environment Canterbury are concerned that an increase in dairying could increase its infestation.

The pest is already present in established dairying areas of the West Coast and Waikato. "Get rid of it as soon as you spot it" is Environment Canterbury's message, so that it doesn't become the next nodding thistle of the area.

Ragwort is unwanted because it competes with pasture and reduces production. It contains alkaloids which are toxic to dairy stock. It can produce 50,000 to 150,000 seeds of which 70 percent may be viable.

The most successful natural control, or biological control, of this pest plant in Canterbury, apart from sheep, is the ragwort flea beetle.

Landcare Research and Environment Canterbury work together in the field of biological control of pest plants in Canterbury. Landcare Research studies the natural predators of some of New Zealand's pest plants. It tests their suitability for release under New Zealand conditions, then passes them to Environment Canterbury staff and other interested groups and individuals for distribution.

There is still more hope for landholders if ragwort does get a foothold. Later this year, the crown boring moth and next year, the plume moth will be released in Canterbury. The cinnabar moth is also a biological control agent for ragwort but its success in the Canterbury region is mixed.

### How do I tell if it's ragwort?

Ragwort is a robust, branched, biannual or perennial which reaches up to 1.5 metres. It has numerous bright yellow flowers, slightly furry leaves, stems that are purplish in colour and has an unpleasant smell when it is crushed.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for ragwort is to: "contain the spread of ragwort to prevent it from infesting adjacent land presently clear of ragwort".

## Rabbits arising

Rabbit numbers seem to be increasing in parts of Canterbury. Environment Canterbury biosecurity staff are suggesting a return to traditional control measures of shooting and poisoning now that there appears to be a trend in many Canterbury rabbit populations towards immunity to rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) which was introduced in 1997.

Environment Canterbury is presently collating its annual nightcount transect results which will show the amount and nature of the increase in rabbit numbers and the levels of their immunity. The details of these surveys will be available toward the end of this year. Figures from the end of 2005 show rabbit numbers in the Ashburton district increased from 0.15 in 2004 to 3.40 in 2005.



The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for rabbits is to: "achieve rabbit densities not exceeding Level 3 on the Modified McLean Scale within the Canterbury region".

\* Level 3 three is described roughly as where odd rabbits are seen and where pellet heaps are spaced 10m or more apart on average.

### A note from Robin Grigg

*Chairman of the Ashburton Pest Management Liaison Committee*

As a newly elected chairman of the Ashburton Pest Liaison Committee it is good to see the regional council communicating directly to ratepayers with this new newsletter about weeds and pests.

The committee is here to look after the interests of the district and to keep a close watch on expenditure and work on pest control by the regional council.

In this first newsletter, the central theme is getting on top of weeds before they get on top of us. It is also a heads-up to give those roadside broom and

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# It's gorse and broom time again

Early summer is a good time to control broom and gorse on properties and boundaries before the busy summer season begins.

The aim of this work is to prevent gorse and broom from infesting land that is presently free of these two plant pests.

It is the responsibility of land owners or occupiers under the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) to contain gorse and broom if they are present on their properties.



Gorse



Broom

## Here is a helpful check list

### Hedges

- Have gorse and broom hedges been clipped or trimmed to prevent plants from setting seed and spreading into clear unaffected areas?

### Roadsides

- Is the roadside clear of gorse and broom?  
or
- Are gorse and broom infestations along the roadside, which are not part of a hedge, at least 10m from the centreline of the road?

### Boundaries

- Is there a 10m clearance along the full boundary to prevent seeds or plants spreading into neighbouring clear, or being cleared, properties?

### Scattered plants

- Have all scattered or isolated plants been killed? (This includes clusters of plants less than 50m<sup>2</sup> and more than 5m from block gorse and broom).

Landholders are not required under the RPMS to eradicate block gorse and broom infestations. (These are infestations greater than 50m<sup>2</sup>). However any extra work is recognised and appreciated by Environment Canterbury and the community.



**Hedges and roadsides:** This is **Not OK** - Gorse and broom need to be at least 10m from boundaries which is the centre of the road.



**Boundaries:** **Good** - This landowner has sprayed and killed all plants that are within 10m of their neighbour's property, that is gorse and broom-free.



**Scattered Plants:** **Not OK** - All scattered plants including patches less than 50m<sup>2</sup> which are more than 5m from block gorse and broom need to be eradicated to prevent spread. A block is a patch greater than 50m<sup>2</sup>.

The responsibility for controlling pests on roadsides varies among districts within the Canterbury region. In the Selwyn District it is the adjacent landholder's responsibility unless the road is a State highway.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for gorse and broom is to prevent land currently free from gorse and broom being infested.

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# What's wrong with wild pine trees?

Wilding conifers are generally undesirable in the Canterbury region because they can very quickly establish and dominate landscapes. They occur through natural regeneration beyond areas of managed trees. Within Canterbury, most river catchments have some wilding spread. The worst affected areas are the Mackenzie basin, the Rakaia and Waimakiriri river catchments, and the Amuri Range near Hanmer Springs.

Possible adverse effects on biodiversity values include smothering indigenous plant communities, altering environments containing indigenous fauna and flora, and drying out wetlands and riparian areas. These native communities may contain threatened species such as native wetas and grasshoppers.

In some situations, wildings will enhance landscape values, while in others they will be viewed as detrimental. But one sure thing is that once wildings are established it becomes expensive to convert the land to pasture or other land uses.

In Canterbury, they pose enough concerns to be included in Environment Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Strategy. This is the road map which outlines Environment Canterbury's plan for managing its undesirable animals and plants. The key approach for wild conifers is to work with land occupiers and community groups to exterminate them in high value areas before they can spread.

Most recently, Environment Canterbury's control efforts have been in the Rangitata catchment - at Erehon, Mt Potts and parts of Mt Possession - in conjunction with the Rangitata Landcare Group with assistance from the Biodiversity Fund\*. Environment Canterbury has also carried out control work in past years in the Craighburn area of the Waimakariri catchment.

\* The biodiversity fund is a Government fund set up to help biodiversity projects on private land. It is administered by the Department of Conservation.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for wild conifers is to: "protect biodiversity values in targeted areas of the Canterbury region by eradicating all self-sown wilding conifers, prior to seed dispersal, in targeted high value environmental areas".

## It's those damned Branta canadensis again

### What to do about Canada geese

The Department of Conservation is presently reviewing the level of protection it gives to some New Zealand wildlife. This will affect the game status of Canada geese which create problems for many farmers in pockets of the Selwyn pest district. Environment Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Strategy does not include Canada geese because as a game species its management is the responsibility of the New Zealand Fish and Game Society. Here's an extract from the review document which serves as a history lesson:

"The New Zealand Canada goose population is descended from birds introduced from North America in 1905-1920. In the South Island it has become well established in eastern areas - especially in Canterbury and North Otago - where it breeds in the high country. In the last 30 years, Canada goose has become established in the North Island also, particularly in the Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Manawatu and the Wairarapa. Canada goose is listed on the Schedule of the Wildlife Act and is therefore a game species. In some places, numbers of Canada geese have risen to levels that cause damage to farmland as they feed on crops and pasture and foul land with their droppings. These high numbers occur despite the game season being extended to 11 months of the year in some parts of the country with no daily bag limit. For this reason, some regional fish and game councils currently have to undertake goose culls to supplement the efforts of recreational hunters. (In the South Island, Canada geese are controlled under the Canada Geese Management Plan 1995 - Ed) In the past couple of years, the Minister of Conservation has received many calls for the game status of Canada goose to be reviewed."

Submissions on the Minister's review can be made until Friday November 3rd this year. Information on the review is available from the Department of Conservation's website.

## Biodiversity work in the Ashburton riverbed

Environment Canterbury has been carrying out predator control work in the Ashburton riverbed over the past four years to protect the wrybill and black-fronted tern and all braided river birds and invertebrates. The work is being carried out at two sites - one below the state highway bridge on the Ashburton River and the other in the south branch of the river at Hakatere. The work has involved trapping mustelids and poisoning possums and rodents. While this work is mainly aimed at wading and braided river birds, there are also spin-offs for all indigenous fauna, including geckos, skinks and invertebrates. The work is in its fourth year now. In the first season's (2003) initial control operation a colony of black backed gulls (estimated at around 500 birds) in the upper river site was targeted on the advice of Department of Conservation, as gulls also opportunistically predate eggs and chicks of other species. Around 40-50 black backed gulls remained after control. This residual population was not controlled in 2004, however and by 2005 numbers had increased and these avian predators were again targeted. This work is being carried-out in partnership with the Department of Conservation and support from two adjacent landowners in the upper site and 37 of the 38 landowners in the lower site. The Department of Conservation undertakes annual counts of braided river birds on the lower Ashburton River between mid-November and mid-December. Predator control within the Ashburton River started before the breeding season in 2003. It may be several years before the effect of predator control is reflected in an increase of nesting wrybill and black fronted tern if at all. However, the counts in the past three years have shown an increase in both banded and black fronted dotterel which may in part be due to predator control efforts.

... A note from Robin Grigg, continued from front cover

gorse bushes a tidy up. It is said that the roadside of the farm is the shopwindow. We all try to avoid putting the crooked stock in the roadside paddocks. Gorse and broom on the roadside is a bit like vomit and takeaway wrappings at the shop door. It does nothing for the first impression of the place, and suggests declining standards behind the window as well. The roadside may not belong to us but we do have a responsibility and a benefit from keeping it tidy. Which means as chairman of the pest liaison committee, I had better get out now and deal to my roadsides before this newsletter reaches the mailboxes.

Canada geese get a mention in this newsletter. The review of their status as a gamebird raises some interesting points. Currently Fish and Game pay the costs of control (about \$60,000 across the South Island each year), and take all the public criticism and heat from hunters for the culls. It is also a system with a single entity arranging the aerial and moult cull operations so there is a co-ordinated approach, if a little slow at times of stress. Control operations on the populations in the riverbeds on the plains will likely become a necessity before too long. Fish and Game also probably gets a more sympathetic hearing from the Department of Conservation and the regional council when it comes to getting the necessary consents to carry out culls over waterbodies.

To go to a free-for-all control situation with pest status on the birds will leave individual farmers with a lot of hassles that they may not particularly want. An alternative that has been suggested is to move to a national or regional pest management strategy. Downsides include Fish and Game and central government walking away from any financial contribution despite their part in causing the problem. Whether the wider farming community should or will pay a rate towards controlling a problem affecting relatively few farmers is another point to be considered. Also, will the strategy simply set compliance requirements (as with rabbits and gorse) or take charge of the issue (as with rooks)?

Ideally, the issues surrounding the setting up of a pest management strategy would be sorted before a decision had to be made whether or not to go for a pest management strategy, or one of the other options.

My opinion is that for all its shortcomings, the status quo has a lot going for it. Why not bend the ear of a member of the pest liaison committee on the Canada geese issue or better still put a submission in to the Department of Conservation via their website?

## Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

Biosecurity in the Ashburton Pest district is mainly carried out by the Central Area Team. The teamleader is Rob McCaw in Christchurch ph 03 353 9009 ext 7460. Christchurch Biosecurity Officers are Gemma Bradfield ext 7168, Stephen Brown ext 7097 and John Thacker ext 7096. The Darfield Biosecurity Officer is Errol Barnes, 03 318 8155. The Little River Biosecurity Officer is Jock Bulman, 03 325 1103.

## A note from Angus McKay

*Environment Canterbury Councillor for Ashburton*

Welcome to the first issue of Pest News Ashburton. This is a newsletter about pest animal and plant issues in the Ashburton Pest Management District. It is produced by Environment Canterbury on behalf of the Ashburton Pest Management Liaison Committee. There are 12 pest management liaison committees in the Canterbury region. In a number of ways they are similar to the former pest destruction boards which were incorporated into the Canterbury Regional Council in 1989. They work to continue the local perspective on pest management issues which existed before the 1989 amalgamation.

Pest management liaison committees play a very important role in helping communities manage pest problems. Region-wide the committees advise Environment Canterbury about work programmes in their districts. They also pass on Environment Canterbury's information about pest management to local communities. If you have an interest in pest management I strongly recommend you get in touch with your local committee. The more people we have helping the committees the better our pest management decisions will be.

This newsletter will make a number of references to the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS). This is the document by which Environment Canterbury manages pest control in the region.

The Strategy is a framework for managing or eradicating specific animals and plants. It is the document which enables Environment Canterbury to dispense the appropriate advice, to provide the correct level of service, and to regulate appropriately, in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Just as importantly it explains how these activities will be funded.

If you have any questions about how Environment Canterbury manages pests in the Ashburton pest district I encourage you to contact Environment Canterbury's biosecurity staff or a member of your local pest management liaison committee.

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