



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.

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.

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".

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 50m² 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 50m²). 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 50m² which are more than 5m from block gorse and broom need to be eradicated to prevent spread. A block is a patch greater than 50m².

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 gorse and broom from infesting land presently free from gorse and broom.

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 Erewhon, 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 Craigeburn area of the Waimakiriri 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 goose 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.



Nassella tussock (*Nassella tricotoma*)

It may not be as common as it is further north in the region but Environment Canterbury is asking all landholders in the region to keep an eye out for nassella tussock. The Hurunui District remains the most seriously infested area (commonly referred to as the nucleus area) followed by Banks Peninsula and the Rakaia River catchment. Nassella is a pest because it grows fast and can rapidly dominate grasslands, eventually smothering them. It is unpalatable to stock. It will grow almost anywhere, but is commonly found on sunny slopes, dry spurs and knobs of tussock grasslands, and in stony riverbeds. Nassella tussock is a tufted perennial with fine leaves, erect when young but slightly drooping when older. The leaves feel rough when rubbed downwards. The plant looks very similar to native tussocks, which makes identification difficult. Mature plants are up to half a metre high and one metre across. Each mature plant can produce up to 100,000 seeds per year. The seed straw is readily carried by wind and can travel many kilometres. It is also distributed by water, stock, and machinery or on the bark of milled trees.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for nassella tussock is to: "progressively reduce the population of nassella tussock within the Canterbury region".

A note from Bill Woods

Environment Canterbury Councillor for Banks Peninsula and Selwyn

Welcome to the first issue of Pest News Selwyn. This is a newsletter about pest animal and plant issues in the Selwyn Pest Management District. It is produced by Environment Canterbury on behalf of the Selwyn 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 Selwyn pest district I encourage you to contact Environment Canterbury's biosecurity staff or a member of your local pest management liaison committee.

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

Biosecurity in the Selwyn 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.



Bill Woods

A note from Roger Gilbert

Member of the Selwyn Pest Management Liaison Committee

Pest Management Liaison committees are Environment Canterbury's main link to the community on pest matters. The regional council works within the Regional Pest Management Strategy which was recently reviewed and became operational in July 2006. Its main work is inspections and monitoring but it does carry out control of total control pests and biodiversity pests. For most pests the land occupier is responsible for control measures. The Selwyn Liaison Committee works with ECan staff and provides advice on operational issues and on financial budgeting.

The newsletter outlines the need for all land occupiers to control scattered gorse and broom plants and to keep roadsides and boundaries clear. The Selwyn committee has concentrated on the hill country areas where gorse and broom is a major problem.

Immunity to rabbit haemorrhagic disease appears to be increasing. Land owners should be considering strategic control by shooting and poisoning to prevent a return to the major problem rabbits posed before RHD was introduced.

An innovation in the 2005-2015 Strategy is the Community Initiative Programme which gives groups the opportunity to control a pest or pests in their local area. The control of nodding thistle in a small seeds producing area is an example of what could be undertaken using the programme.

I hope this newsletter will improve communications between ratepayers and the Liaison Committee and attract more people to become involved in pest management and with the committee.

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Roger Gilbert

Pay us an e-visit

Copies of all pest newsletters are available at www.ecan.govt.nz. If you would like to see more information on this site about animal and plant pest management, please phone pest portfolio manager, Rob Phillips on 353 9009 ext 7069 or rob.phillips@ecan.govt.nz

www.ecan.govt.nz