

Keep an eye out for spreading pests



*By Robin Grigg
Chair, Ashburton Pest
Management Liaison Committee.*

Here in Ashburton District we are at a fortunate moment in time with most pests in some semblance of control. Rooks, touch wood, are gone from the district.

However, as was shown recently in town where old man's beard was found in a supermarket carpark growing on the back wall of a stock and station firm, it pays to keep an eye out for any spread of the pests. How many of us saw that straggly creeper on the wall as we went in to buy the groceries and didn't recognise it?

Not everyone is aware

OK, so we might be new to the problem, but that highlights another factor coming up in pest control and that is that with generational turnover, and farm sales there are many farm owners and managers who are perhaps not aware of the pest threats to their properties. After all it has been many years since RCV was released and dealt to the rabbit problem.

With the intensification of farming on the plains and the huge increase in irrigation, areas which used to regularly need nightshooting to keep the rabbits down are now probably at low risk of serious rabbit infestation. The removal of shelterbelts, for all the negatives, has also removed one of the havens for rabbits on the plains.



Rabbits in rivers

Those against the main riverbeds with the thick cover of gorse, broom and willows are still living on the edge of a serious rabbit problem. There is a major rabbit problem already in the Hakatamea valley centred on riverbeds and I hear that there are riverbed rabbit problems in North

Canterbury as well. For those bounding the riverbeds now might be the time to have a quiet wee check of where the legal boundaries against the river actually are. It has been suggested that if we go back to something like the level of rabbit problems of the past, the annualised cost of poisoning operations could be similar to the cost of annual topdressing of that country. With the price of farmland these days it might not be so silly to think about making use of the land out to your river boundary so that in years to come expenditure on that land is for production and not just spent on rabbits.

Development in the high country

In the high country of the district there has also been considerable development of flats formerly prone to rabbits, so the problem areas have been reduced by a method which goes some way towards paying for itself. Another reduction in areas of the farmed high country prone to rabbits has been the substantial area of the most pest prone country which has been surrendered to, or better still bought by the Crown for the Hakatere Conservation Park. Quite how DoC as the new owners will respond to any upsurge in rabbit numbers on their new estate, or even whether they are fully aware of the extent of the risk, is an interesting point.

Nassella Field day

With the new generation of runholders in the Rakaia Gorge, Charles Todhunter from Glenfalloch Station has made the very good suggestion that the committee hold a field day in the lower Rakaia Gorge to get everyone up to speed with what nassella tussock looks like, how to spot it and how to deal with it. Nassella has previously been found in the Rakaia riverbed and even, I understand, as impressive tussocks in some urban gardens.

If you have concerns about how pests are being dealt with in the district, or feel that you have been less than fairly dealt with, tell the ECan staff that you are dealing with what your concerns are, and if that doesn't work let the senior staff in ECan know. Approach Councillor Angus Mackay as your local elected representative, and Eugenie Sage as the chair of the ECan pest management portfolio if things are starting to go wrong, because they can help to solve the problem from the top down.

Whatever the outcome, let me or a member of the pest liaison committee know what is going on, so that we can give the council an informed niggles on the issue.

continued on page 2 ...



Rabbits on the rise

Councillor Eugenie Sage, Pests and Biosecurity Portfolio chair

Welcome to this edition of Pest News. Congratulations to the recently elected members and chair of the Pest Management Liaison Committee (PMLC). Their names and contact details

are on the back page of this newsletter. The committee and its counterparts around the region have an invaluable role in advising Environment Canterbury on how the Regional Pest Management Strategy, which provides the framework for the control or eradication of specified animal and plant pests in the region, is best implemented.

The committees also comment on ECan's annual budget for pest work and the level of targeted rate for their pest district, and liaise between rural landholders and the Council. The committees are elected every three years after the local body elections.

ECan's rabbit trend count monitoring has shown high or rising rabbit numbers in rabbit-prone districts such as Waikari, Amuri, Ashburton and the Mackenzie Basin, and increased levels of immunity to rabbit calicivirus (RCV) in young rabbits. It is increasingly urgent for landholders to plan to fund and organise rabbit control using traditional methods such as aerial spreading of 1080 impregnated carrot bait.

The Regional Council's rabbit co-ordinator can advise on what methods are cost effective and best practice

technically, and promote co-ordination where this is needed across several landholdings.

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) is being a good neighbour and has usefully organised rabbit control over some sizeable areas, such as part of the Waiau riverbed.

An estimated 26,000 ha. in Canterbury now have rabbit numbers above the modified McLean scale level three, the level where the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) requires that control be undertaken. Environment Canterbury is preparing to issue 36 Action on Default notices under the Biosecurity Act (more than usual). These notices mean ECan can undertake the work and then charge the occupier.

While meat and wool returns may be low this year, postponing rabbit control risks compounding the problem, being an unhelpful neighbour, and making control more difficult and expensive next winter. Prompt, well timed and executed control may "reset" rabbit populations to extend the effectiveness of RCV.

To help make the current "user pays" regime more effective, Environment Canterbury plans to apply for a region wide resource consent for the use of 1080 impregnated baits to control rabbits, possums, and wallabies in targeted areas. Stakeholder consultation is underway. If granted, the consent could be used by contractors certified by ECan.

I am happy to be contacted about pest issues. I look forward to working with landholders and community interests on the most effective ways to control animal and weed pests to benefit farming and biodiversity.

...continued from page 1

Rabbit co-ordinator

Recently the Chairs of the pest liaison committees were able to persuade ECan to fund a co-ordinator to help farmers who are affected by rabbits, and under notice from ECan to clean up the problem, to get through the necessary consent processes and source poisoning contractors. Generally help has a cost, and ECan is to be congratulated on its funding of the co-ordinator from what previously had been a grant to the former Target Pests to maintain pest control capability in Canterbury.

At the recent annual general meeting the Ashburton Pest Management Liaison Committee for the next three years was elected. Of note was the election of a new member who will be particularly interested in the biodiversity protection work which is part of the pest management portfolio.

Those elected are there to give the benefit of their knowledge, but also to pass on the concerns of ratepayers in relation to pests. So feel free to pass on any such concerns to us.

The more interested people are, the better our decisions

*A brief note from Councillor Angus McKay
Environment Canterbury Councillor for Ashburton*

The purpose of this newsletter is to introduce landholders in the Ashburton district to their pest management liaison committee members and to raise awareness about some of the pest management issues in the district.

If you have an interest in pest management I strongly recommend you get in touch with your local committee.

The more aware we are, the better our pest management decisions will be.



Pay us an e-visit

Copies of all pest newsletters are available at www.ecan.govt.nz.

www.ecan.govt.nz

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).

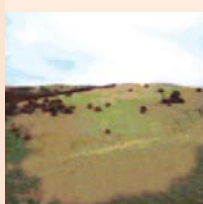
Landholders are not required under the RPMS to eradicate block gorse and broom infestations. (These are infestations greater than 50m²). However any extra work is recognised and appreciated by Environment Canterbury and the community.



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 district councils within the Canterbury region. In the Ashburton 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.

Biological control – natural born killers

Environment Canterbury and other regional councils work with Landcare Research in the field of biological control of pest plants. 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 and other regional councils for distribution.

Biological control agents released in Canterbury include agents for controlling gorse, broom, old mans beard, hieracium, ragwort and nodding thistle. In the Ashburton Pest District agents for nodding thistle have been working. They are the gall fly, the receptacle weevil and the crown root weevil.



Pay special attention to suspicious looking reeds or grasses

The invasive and very aggressive pest plant phragmites has made several appearances in the Ashburton district. The plant is so aggressive that it can grow through tarmac and cracks in concrete. It is a vigorous growing robust grass which has the potential to form dense stands. It is mainly spread by broken rhizome fragments (underground horizontal stems). It grows mostly on the margins of water bodies but can still grow in dry ground and can also tolerate slightly saline conditions. If you suspect you have found phragmites, please contact Environment Canterbury's Potential Pest Line on (03) 363 9380 or email weeds@ecan.govt.nz and attach a photo if you wish. Phragmites can also be reported to MAF Biosecurity New Zealand's pests and diseases free phone number 0800 80 99 66. Phragmites can look very similar to other tall grasses. Here are a few things to check for if you spot a tall grass-like plant or reed near or in a waterway that you think may be phragmites:

- It grows to between 2 to 4 m tall and dies back over winter.
- Its long, smooth, flat leaf blades can be up to 60 cm long.
- Its leaf margins are rough and the leaf sheaths are overlapping.
- Its stems are hollow and the flowers are produced in a dense, dark purple, feathery flowerhead which is 20-50 cm long.
- The membrane on the inside of the leaf at the point where the blade leaves the stem, (known as the ligule) has a fringe of long hairs.

It may be confused with Giant Reed (*Arundo, Arundo donax*) or Bamboo which do not die off over winter, and Raupo.

Old man's beard

Old man's beard is being attacked in the Ashburton Riverbed. The attack is part of the riverworks programme carried out by Environment Canterbury in conjunction with its river rating committee. The work is part of a long term plan to manage the invasive pest in the riverbed from the coast to Highway 72. So far the plant has been cleared from willows along about 15 kilometers of riverbed from Lake Hood to Ashburton Town, and from both the north and south branches west of town between Ollivers Rd and Shearers crossing. New willows have been planted in a pattern which incorporates grassed access areas to allow maintenance work to be done in the future.

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

The Biosecurity Manager is responsible for implementing the Regional Pest Management Strategy. The Biosecurity Manager is Graham Sullivan. Phone 03 684 0535.

The biosecurity section is organised into three teams: Northern, Central and Southern. The Banks Peninsula Pest Management District is in the Central area

The Central Area Team Leader is Rob McCaw in Christchurch. Christchurch Biosecurity Officers are Gemma Bradfield, Stephen Brown, Sam Thompson and John Thacker, 03 365 3828. The Darfield Biosecurity Officer is Errol Barnes, 03 3188 009. The Little River Biosecurity Officer is Jock Bulman, 03 325 1103.

Rabbit Matters: Timaru-based Brent Glentworth is responsible for all rabbit matters south of the Waimakariri River. Ph 03 684 0500

Contracts Management: Kevin Gallagher is the Bovine Tb and Contracts Manager. He is responsible for managing the Tb vector control programme as part of the national pest management strategy within Canterbury. He is based at the Christchurch office, 03 363 9320. Kevin is helped by Bovine Tb management officers Pleasant Point-based Grant May 027 2844 813 and Amberley-based Phil Spencer 027 437 4745.

Pests and Biosecurity Portfolio Committee Chairperson is Cr Eugenie Sage, ph 03 942 1251 or eugenie.sage@ecan.govt.nz

Ashburton Pest Management Liaison Committee members

Robin Bruce
Ph/fax 307 0008

Robin Grigg, Chairman
robin.grigg@xtra.co.nz
Ph/fax 303 9841

Charles Todhunter
chastodhunter@xtra.co.nz
Ph 318 5843, fax 318 5892

David B Cook
Ph 303 0933, fax 303 0932

Edward Oakley
bmo.welo@inet.net.nz
Ph 302 7262

Rupert Curd
Ph 302 4754, fax 302 4656

Cr A R McKay
Ph 302 8660, fax 302 8886

Peter Reveley
Ph 303 9834, fax 303 9040

Allan Sinclair
allanandmary@xtra.co.nz
Ph 308 3331