

Not everyone has low rabbit numbers



By Peter Moynihan, Chair
South Canterbury Pest Management
Liaison Committee

The South Canterbury Pest District has the most stable rabbit population within the Canterbury region. We are fortunate to have the second lowest regional average in rabbit numbers. Landowners will notice

mini epidemics of rabbits that are then controlled by RCV each year. Environment Canterbury has 221.6 kilometres of transect lines over 21 properties that it uses to monitor rabbit numbers in South Canterbury. Only two properties in the Rollesby area show concerning increases in numbers. However, in neighbouring pest districts (Kurow, Omarama and down the Haldon Road in the Mackenzie) the picture is completely different, with many properties facing expensive poisoning operations. In many cases the cost is equivalent to 50% of the gross income per hectare and is not sustainable. Consequently the landholders are seeking to move away from user pays to a rating system of some sort.

Rabbit coordinator

The pest committee chairs have persuaded ECan to fund a coordinator to help farmers affected by rabbits and under notice from ECan to clean up the problem and get through the necessary consent processes and find poisoning contractors. ECan is funding the co-ordinator to a certain level and after that it is on a user pays basis. Land Information NZ has in the past been tardy in funding rabbit work in river systems, but now have come to the party which is good news for farmers on rabbit-prone ground next to riverbeds.

Intensification of farming systems down country is having a negative effect on rabbit habitat with the irrigating of new areas and removal of tree belts. Balancing this change in land use is the large amount of hill country being taken by the Crown for conservation. Some of this land is very rabbit-prone and also has an expanding wallaby infestation.

Gorse, broom and wallabies

Wallaby numbers are ever-increasing and will be expensive to control. There will have to be co-ordinated work done between properties with major problems or else we are doomed to fail.

While the pest committee acknowledges the financial problems of sheep and beef farmers, we urge you to try

and continue with gorse and broom management. As you are no doubt aware persisting with control of these weeds is very important as even a couple of years without control can result in a significant increase in plant population size and distribution, therefore resulting in further loss of production.

Tb Control funding

At their May meeting, the Pest Management Liaison Committee Chairs from around the region discussed whether Environment Canterbury should continue to collect rates for Tb control now that the Animal Health Board has decided to control Tb operations in-house. This means that ECan will no longer manage these projects. ECan has asked the pest management chairs for their thoughts on whether they should continue to collect the rate for the AHB. The thought at the table was that the chairs wouldn't want ECan to collect rates when it had no control over how the money was spent. The South Canterbury Pest Liaison Committee is disappointed that ECan has lost the contract, because things are going well in the Canterbury region.

South Canterbury rabbits

From the Canterbury Regional Rabbit Trends Report 2007



The South Canterbury pest district has the most stable rabbit population within the Canterbury region with an average of just under one (0.97) rabbit per km. The trend suggests no measurable change in rabbit numbers in the past few years. Only Banks Peninsula pest district has a lower average regionally.

Before the arrival of RCV in 1997 South Canterbury had an average of 2.41 rabbits per km caused by
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Committee's work invaluable

By Councillor Eugenie Sage, Pest Portfolio chair



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

Highlights for the last 12 months include the continued decline in the number of cattle and deer herds in Canterbury infected with bovine TB, to 14 in April. This is well ahead of the region's June 2008 target of 27 infected herds and is on track to achieve the 2013 goal of 0.2% infected herds or two herds in every thousand.

Unfortunately and despite strong representations from Environment Canterbury, the Animal Health Board (AHB) has decided to remove the management of vector control contracts from the regional council and take over this role itself. The 12 months until July 2009 will be a transition



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higher pockets in the hill country. Some of these areas are showing increases again. A sample of rabbits was collected in February 2008 returning a 51.6% sero positive result, meaning this percentage is immune to the RCV virus.

Over the past few years reports of increased rabbit numbers are more frequent particularly noticeable around the breeding season (from around August to March). However RCV epidemics seem to curb the majority of these pockets at this stage, reducing numbers to below Environment Canterbury's trigger point for enforcement, which is Level 3 on the Modified McLean Scale. Level 3 is described as odd rabbits seen, sign and some buck heaps showing up, with pellet heaps spaced 10 meters' or more apart on average.

period. In the 2008/09 year the regional council will continue to collect the 10% local share contribution towards the cost of funding the AHB programme. It will consult further before deciding what arrangements should apply in 2009/10.

As well as appointing a new rabbit coordinator, 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. eugenie.sage@ecan.govt.nz

Looking-out for the Canterbury Knobbled Weevil

As well as controlling pest animals and plants that degrade the regional economy, Environment Canterbury also contributes to the protection of some identified threatened species, generally through pest control. One such project is Environment Canterbury's involvement with efforts to aid Canterbury's critically endangered Knobbled Weevil by reducing the likelihood of predation, thought to be a substantial factor in the decline of the beetle's population.

Lincoln University and Department of Conservation surveys between October 2005 and February 2008, found only 28 weevils located in just two hectares of the 13.5 ha reserve. It seems that the large (12-18mm) potentially nocturnal weevil, was once common on Speargrass throughout Canterbury's undisturbed native grasslands.

Numbers were at such a critical level that Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation and Lincoln University got together to prevent a further decrease in the population by developing a predator control programme to reduce the number of animals likely to prey on the weevil.

A trapping programme is now carried out annually, targeting larger predators (hedgehogs, feral cats, mustelids). This technique allows stomach contents to be examined for the weevils. Smaller predators (rats and mice) are controlled by rodent baits. Another possible predator, the possum, is already controlled in the area as part of ECan's work to prevent the spread of Bovine Tb.

Because of their very low numbers, the effect of the control operation on the weevil's population is hard to assess immediately. Scientists from Lincoln University are still monitoring the population as well as checking other sites containing speargrass in the region which might host the weevils.

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

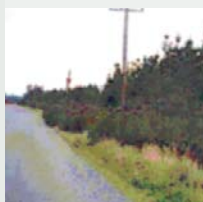
Here is a helpful check list

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?



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

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

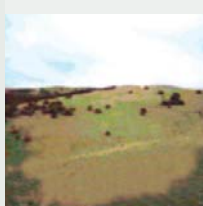


Boundaries: Good - This landowner has sprayed and killed all plants that are within 10m of their neighbour's property, that is gorse and broom-free.

Scattered plants

- 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.



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 Waimate and Mackenzie District it is the adjacent landholder's responsibility unless the road is a State Highway. In the Timaru and Waitaki Districts it is the responsibility of the road controlling authority.

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 currently at work in Canterbury include insects for controlling gorse, broom, old mans beard, hieracium, ragwort and nodding thistle. The gorse soft shoot moth is a recent release in the Kurow district, and hopefully more releases are on the way this coming Spring-Summer.



Infected herds continue to diminish

*Bovine Tb control in the South of the region
From the Tb contracts management team*

All possum and Ferret operations in the southern part of the Canterbury region were completed by the first week in June.

The 25 operations have generally gone well. Most operations passed the Residual Trap Catch monitoring requirements first time.

A large number of ferrets (5700) were captured in this year's operations as part of the search for infected vectors and none have been found to be infected with Tb so far, but there are still animals to be autopsied. Infected herds continue to diminish with three herds on movement control in the south of the region down from four at this time last year.

The 2008/09 operation programme has been finalised and approved by the Animal Health Board and there will be another year of strategic control work throughout the southern region. As well a new operation called Clear Stream is to be added to the programme. This is the area covering the large Otematata River catchment and fills the gap on the southern region's boundary.

Surveillance continues in the Fairlie Basin to guard against the movement of Tb infected vectors into the area, and buffer control operations continue from the Hunter Hills to Mt Dobson.

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Please make yourself aware of nassella tussock

It may not be as common as it is further north in the region but Environment Canterbury is asking all landholders in the South Canterbury Pest District to keep an eye out for nassella tussock. Nassella can be found throughout the Canterbury region. The Hurunui District remains the most seriously infested area followed by Banks Peninsula and the Rakaia River catchment.

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.

Nassella is classified as a serious pest as it grows fast and can rapidly dominate and eventually smother grasslands. Nassella is unpalatable to stock and will grow almost anywhere, however this invasive tussock is most commonly found on sunny slopes, dry spurs, knobs of tussock grassland and in stony riverbeds.

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

ECan's Biosecurity section is divided into three teams: Northern, Central and Southern. The South Canterbury Pest Management District falls into the Southern areas jurisdiction.

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

The Southern Area Team Leader, is Brent Glentworth. Timaru Biosecurity Officers are Terry Broughton, Glen Currall and Bridget Keenan, all are located at the Timaru Office and can be reached by telephone number (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. Rabbit control coordinator, Steve Palmer is a contractor to Environment Canterbury. His phone number is 027 348 5394.

Pests and Biosecurity Portfolio Committee
Chairperson is Cr Eugenie Sage, ph: (03) 942 1251