October 2008

Pest News

Kaikoura edition

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

Nassella Tussock around Kaikoura

Nassella tussock occurs on 49 properties in the Kaikoura Pest District, where infestations vary from just the occasional plant to substantial infestations that require many hours of control work.

Nassella tussock is a tufted plant with fine leaves which are erect when young but slightly drooping when older. Nassella tussock leaves feel quite rough when rubbed downwards. The plant is very similar to native tussock in appearance, which can make identification difficult.

Nassella tussock must be controlled annually by 30 September each year. Plants need to be hand grubbed by methodically 'beating off' the entire property and grubbing all plants found. On properties with general or scattered infestations, the task is labour intensive and time consuming, but this is the only way to gradually reduce nassella, by ensuring that as few plants as possible are left to seed.

Environment Canterbury Biosecurity Officers encourage all landholders to familiarise themselves with nassella because the more people who are out and about and can recognise the plant the better.

Environment Canterbury especially asks all landowners who have a property where nassella tussock is or has been found in the past, to please be vigilant over the entire property when carrying out control work.

Anybody who thinks they may have found nassella tussock or has concerns about this plant should contact a Biosecurity Officer at Environment Canterbury in Kaikoura or Cheviot.

Nassella tussock flourishing within a forestry block

Representing your pest district

If you have an interest in pest management issues and would like to become a member of your Kaikoura committee please contact Biosecurity Team Leader, Laurence Smith on Ph. 03 314 8014.

Rabbit Coordination

Recently appointed 'Rabbit Coordinator' Steve Palmer (Airon Pest Solutions Ltd) has bought a wealth of animal pest management experience to the community. The Rabbit Coordinator position was created by Environment Canterbury in 2007 and is an advisory and coordination role. It fills a need, recognised by land occupiers and Pest Management Liaison Committees throughout the region, as rabbit numbers on prone country soar towards pre-RHD levels and traditional control methods are required to get numbers back to acceptable levels.

Steve has been working with seven groups throughout the region and with Land Information NZ who are responsible for pest control in many of the riverbeds in Canterbury.

With over 22 years' experience in animal pest control Steve has a great deal of expertise in the planning and management of aerial work.

"In an rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) environment, any control method that kills potentially immune, adult rabbits is beneficial to a degree, but with immunity averaging between 50 and 70% controlling a low percentage of rabbits in the hope that RHD will take care of the rest is no longer a viable option," Steve said.

"Effective rabbit control that will last indefinitely and obtain the best results from the cycles of RHD needs 95% of the population to be controlled in a short period of time. Piecemeal rabbit control spread over weeks or months will not keep ahead of breeding cycles and rabbit movement," he said.

An increasing number of properties throughout Canterbury are reporting rabbit numbers well above the level that control work is required.

Environment Canterbury
Your regional council

Committee's work invaluable

By Councillor Eugenie Sage, Pest and Biosecurity Portfolio chairperson

Congratulations to the recently elected members of the Pest Management Liaison Committee (PMLC). The committee and its counterparts around the region advise Environment Canterbury (ECan) on how the Regional Pest Management Strategy, which provides the framework for the control or eradication of listed animal and plant pests, 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 infected with bovine Tb, to 14 in Canterbury in April. This is on track to achieve the 2013 goal of 0.2% infected herds or two herds in every thousand.

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 period. In 2008/09 ECan 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.

With rising levels of immunity to Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in young rabbits, the 10-year control holiday may be ending. An estimated 26,000 ha in Canterbury now have rabbit numbers above the modified McLean scale level 3, the level where the Regional Pest Management Strategy requires that control be undertaken.

There has been a strong landholder response to increasing rabbit numbers. Aerial control operations in the Waiau have been helped by Land Information NZ organising control in part of the riverbed. In North Canterbury, 38 properties were non-compliant in the year to 30 June 2008, but the Council has only had to start organising rabbit control itself (and recovering the costs from the landholder) for one property.

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

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

Councillor Eugenie Sage Ph. 03 942 1251 or email: eugenie.sage@ecan.govt.nz

Rabbits on the rise

From the Canterbury Regional Rabbit Trends Report 2007

Rabbit numbers continue to increase in many areas of the Canterbury region. In the Kaikoura Pest District 30 property inspections to check rabbit levels have been carried out up to June 30 this year.

From these inspections 7 landowners have been issued with Notices of Direction requiring them to reduce rabbit levels on their land making a total of 15 properties in the district currently under a Notice of Direction.

In the Kaikoura District the historically rabbit-prone country lies mainly to the west of Kaikoura on land adjacent to the Clarence River, on the hill and coastal country around the Kekerengu area and in the various riverbeds throughout the district.

The traditional rabbit control methods of patch poisoning, night shooting and fumigation are once again the chosen options as increasing immunity to RHD reduces the impact of the disease. These methods are quite successful on low-level rabbit infestations and small isolated pockets but coordinated poison programmes are required for larger problems.

Farming communities are generally aware of the decreasing effectiveness of RHD and more and more individuals are carrying traditional rabbit control, rather than pinning hopes on the possibility of a more effective disease outbreak next time around. This proactive approach is encouraged.

Higher levels of immunity to RHD and increasing rabbit numbers need to be addressed and in the "user pays" environment of pest control it is the responsibility of the land occupier to carry out this work. Discussion between neighbours will help occupiers to take a coordinated approach to control work to ensure that operations are effective and re-infestation from adjacent properties does not occur.

If you require further information or wish to discuss rabbit issues on your property please contact Biosecurity Team Leader Laurence Smith at the Amberley Office of Environment Canterbury. Ph 03 314 8014

‘Sharing’ Problem Plants

The ECan Biosecurity team has recently expressed concern about the “sharing” of some regionally restricted garden plant species. While garden centres and nurseries are checked annually and any identified listed Restricted Plants are destroyed, it is apparent that some weedy species are still being actively circulated within the community.

It is likely that most people consider some plants quite harmless and have no qualms about passing them on to friends or neighbours, however there are a number of plants identified as Restricted Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS). If a plant is classified as Restricted its usually because it has been identified as a potential threat to the agricultural or native landscape (as it has exhibited weedy tendencies either within Canterbury or elsewhere). Even if planted in the garden, it has the potential to jump the fence and threaten natural ecosystems and production. Therefore it is an offence under the Biosecurity Act to sell, propagate or distribute any plant species that is classified as a Restricted Pest.

A number of familiar plants presently listed as Restricted – buddleja (Buddleja davidii), artillery/aluminium plant (Galeobdolon luteum), Spanish heath (Erica lusitanica) and German ivy (Senecio milkaniodes) – are just a few of a long list. Gardeners are not required to remove Restricted Plants present in their gardens but are urged to dispose of any vegetation responsibly such as at the greens area of your local land fill, NOT in riverbeds or farm dump sites as it increases the chance of these plants further establishing in native or productive communities.

A good example of how Restricted Plants are easily spread in the community was brought up by the owner of a garden centre recently. He received a call from a member of public asking if he stocked Mexican daisy or artillery/aluminium plant. He explained that these were Restricted Plants and it was illegal for him to sell them. Unconcerned the woman said that she would get some cuttings of these plants from a friend or her old garden and re-plant them at her new property. If anyone has tried to control Artillery plant they will know how hard it is to kill in a garden setting let alone if it escapes into the wild. It is important to understand that these plants wear the restricted tag for a reason and although they may not show too many weedy tendencies in a controlled garden, they can, in a suitable environment, become a real nuisance and extremely difficult and costly to control.

Gardeners can make a difference by identifying and preventing further circulation of problem plants. For information on Restricted Plants and how to control them please contact a Biosecurity Officer at Amberley, who will be willing to help.

Good progress with Bovine Tb control

From the Tb Contracts Management Team

Good progress is being made with the control and containment of Bovine Tb in the Kaikoura Pest District.

The 2007/08 possum control programme has been completed, with contracting companies achieving their contract specifications.

In the 2006/07 round up, 329 ferrets and 2528 possums were dispatched, with1245 of the possums coming from the Kowhai/Swyncombe operation, which included initial control work up the Stag and Spey Road.

In the 2007/08 round up, 491 ferrets and 3184 possums were dispatched with 1644 possums coming from the Conway North operation which included initial control areas. Pre-control monitoring was carried out at Mt Fyffe and Conway Hills. Their RTCIs were 6.68% and 3.67% respectively. RTCI stands for residual trap count index. The percentage represents the number of possums caught per 100 traps. Pre control monitoring enables the trap counts to be compared before and after the operation to determine its success.

For the 2008/09 programme, the money available for Canterbury has been reduced so the control programme is targeted more specifically to our at risk areas. Not all operations require possum and ferret control work every year.

The control programme for the Kaikoura Pest District is :

Clarence East	Targeted possum and ferret control
Clarence West	Targeted possum and ferret control
Conway North	Targeted possum control
Hapuku Buffer	Targeted possum and ferret control
Kekerengu	Targeted possum and ferret control
Kowhai/Swyncombe	Targeted possum and targeted ferret control

Please note: Complete possum control indicates that the whole operation is being worked. Targeted possum control indicates that just parts are being worked.

Movement Control Herds (12-06-08) – Northern Region

	Cattle	*Deer*	*District totals*
Kaikoura	*3*	*0*	*3*
Amuri	*3*	*1*	*4*
Waikari	*3*	*1*	*4*
Ashley	*1*	*0*	*1*
Region totals	***10***	***2***	***12***

Phillip Spencer
Northern Region Bovine Tb Contracts Manager

Old Man's Beard

Old man's beard has an extensive presence in the Kaikoura district. This vigorous deciduous vine is found in the Kowai, Waimangara, Oaro and Kahutara riverbeds. Occupying much of the lower reaches of Mt Fyffe, it has spread its fast moving tentacles over the top of some beautiful native bush. Scattered sites occur along the length of the coastline to Oaro, where a large infestation, upstream of the State Highway Bridge over the Oaro River, is receiving concentrated control efforts from contractors and Environment Canterbury Biosecurity Officers. The Department of Conservation also carries out control work on land that it is responsible for.

The Kaikoura Township has many scattered sites around private properties and on the terraces above the waterfront. Many hedges and shelterbelts across the plains contain old man's beard and in all these areas mentioned above the plant has yet to even approach its full potential coverage.

Biosecurity staff have carried out considerable searches over previous months and have mailed inspection advices to many land occupiers in the district asking them to do work to control scattered and boundary old man's beard infestations. As a result of these inspections many individuals have carried out a lot of control work across the district.

The ability of old man's beard to form a tangled, smothering mass over trees and shrubs, blocking out light and eventually killing supporting plants, makes the plant a huge threat to the natural beauty of the Kaikoura coastline and surrounding native bush areas, which are a large part of the attraction that draws tourists and visitors to the district. Old man's beard is classed as a biodiversity pest under Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Strategy 2005 (RPMS). The strategy's objective is to reduce infestation levels sufficiently to ensure that biodiversity values are protected in targeted high-value areas of the Canterbury region.

The children of Lynton Downs School display an isolated old man's beard vine found at their school recently. Biosecurity Officer Tom Kirkwood, pictured here with the children, assisted them to control the vine.

Environment Canterbury's biosecurity staff help identify high value areas to be protected. They also advise and assist interested and concerned land occupiers and community groups to destroy old man's beard especially in areas that are adjacent to high value areas.

Please help stop the spread of this pest. The Regional Pest Management Strategy requires land occupiers to control their scattered old man's beard and keep their boundaries clear. If you have carried out control work on your property in the past you will need to recheck the site each summer for regrowth. If you have a vine that you suspect may be old man's beard, please contact Environment Canterbury's biosecurity staff for identification and ways to control this fast growing plant.

Pests and Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

The Biosecurity Section is organised into three teams: Northern, Central and Southern. The Kaikoura, Amuri, Ashley and Waikari Pest Management Districts are in the Northern area.

The Northern Area Team Leader is Laurence Smith in Amberley. Amberley-based Biosecurity Officers are Jan Crooks, Peter Morgan, Lance Smith and Lindsay Scott. Leanne Lye is Biosecurity Support Officer for the Northern team, ph. 03 314 8014. The Cheviot Biosecurity Officers are Noel Crump and Tom Kirkwood, ph. 03 319 8614. The Kaikoura Biosecurity Officer is Peter Adams, ph 03 319 7567.

Bovine Tb and Contracts Manager is Kevin Gallagher. 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, ph. 03 363 9320. In the northern area Kevin is helped by Amberley-based Bovine TB Management Officer Phil Spencer, ph. 03 314 7034 or 027 437 4745.

Rabbit Control Coordinator, Steve Palmer is a contractor to Environment Canterbury, ph. 03 319 8400 or 027 348 5394, or email: airon@xtra.co.nz

The Biosecurity Manager, Timaru-based Graham Sullivan is responsible for implementing the Regional Pest Management Strategy, ph. 03 684 0535.

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

Kaikoura Pest Management Liaison Committee

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