July 2006

Pest News

Waikari edition

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

Watch out for Chilean needle grass

Chilean needle grass was first recorded in New Zealand in the 1930s however there are only two areas of widespread infestation in the country - in Hawkes Bay and in Marlborough. The limited distribution is possibly due to the heavy seed produced by this plant, which tends to fall close to the parent plant unless it is spread in hay, by stock or vehicles.

Chilean needle grass is unpalatable to stock when seeding and forms dense stands in pasture dramatically reducing productivity after a few years. It produces extremely sharp and hairy seed, which catches easily onto passing animals, and can then burrow into the skin causing severe irritation and wounds to the animals as well as damaging pelts. The seed tail has a corkscrew effect as it burrows into its host so is difficult to remove. Like barley grass the seed can work its way into tissue and muscle causing abscessing and downgrading carcass value.

Chilean needle grass leaves are bright green and rough to touch. The flowers have a purplish tinge and the seed has a distinctive long twisting tail. The plant is quite difficult to identify but is easier to see when the sun is lower in the sky making the flowering stems glow silver.

In the Marlborough District, Chilean needle grass has a control status similar to Canterbury's nassella tussock where occupiers are required to destroy all plants annually. However in core or nucleus areas only a 10-metre boundary clearance is required. It is possible to manage Chilean needle grass in this way because unlike nassella tussock the seed is not wind-borne.

During the seeding period, which occurs between November and March depending on the weather, occupiers de-stock blocks or paddocks to prevent damage to fleece or carcasses and also to prevent the spread of this costly plant pest to other areas of the property. In some cases this requires the removal of stock from most of the property which severely restricts farming practices.

So far there are no recorded incidences of the plant in the Canterbury region and every precaution should be taken to ensure this plant does not get a foothold here.

Keeping roadsides clear - gorse, broom and other nasties

Protect district council control work - trim hedges and control scattered plants

Gorse and broom are common throughout much of the Waikari pest district. Land occupiers are required to contain large infestations by eradicating isolated plants and patches that are less than 50 square metres in size. While biosecurity staff acknowledge work done to control block infestations, this work does not take away the requirement to control isolated plants and patches, which is always the first priority. Land occupiers must also clear gorse and broom 10 metres from adjoining property boundaries to prevent neighbouring properties from becoming infested.

On roadside boundaries land occupiers are responsible for controlling plant pests from and including the boundary fence into their property for various specified distances depending on the plant.

Hurunui District Council rates land occupiers in the district for the cost of carrying out roadside control work. It then becomes the responsibility of land occupiers to protect this work by eliminating gorse and broom back 10 metres, old mans beard back 20 metres, and nodding thistle and ragwort back 40 metres from the road to meet the requirements of Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Strategy.

If you are in any doubt about what you are being asked to do when you receive an inspection advice, please contact a Biosecurity Officer at Environment Canterbury's Amberley Office.

Environment Canterbury
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African feather grass

African feather grass is a large clump-forming perennial grass which grows up to two metres tall. A native of South Africa, it thrives in damp situations but can tolerate drought and establish on dry, shady banks. It can be confused with pampas or toetoe but has a long, narrow flower spike, while pampas and toetoe produce fluffy flower heads. Flowering occurs from December to April.

Once used as an ornamental plant for landscaping purposes it is still sometimes found in residential gardens, often around ponds. African feather grass spreads quickly, crowding out native species. It is also a fire hazard and can block waterways.

The extensive root system of this grass makes it a difficult plant to remove. It produces large amounts of seed, which can be distributed by wind or water and carried on clothing, machinery, animal hair or wool.

African feather grass has been found on 47 properties in the north of the region. Seven properties in the Waikari pest district have sites although only one site was active when inspections were carried out in January this year. The inspecting officer controlled the plants at this site as African feather grass is classified as a Total Control plant under the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

For further information or if you find a plant you believe may be African feather grass please contact your local Biosecurity Officer to report your sighting.

Saffron thistle

Saffron thistle was first recorded in New Zealand in 1931. It was accidentally introduced as a contaminant in wheat from Australia. Across the Tasman the thistle occurs in every state where it causes significant problems in both crops and pasture.

A member of the daisy family, it is native to the Mediterranean and Western Asia. The plant is described as an erect, rigid annual, which usually grows to a height of one metre. The seeds usually germinate in autumn and grow into a rosette with soft dark green leaves. In late spring / early summer a single, stiff wiry stem emerges from the centre of the rosette, the leaves wither and disappear. The stem divides into many branches, each branch carrying a flower bud. Flowering occurs in December / January producing bright yellow flowers, which along with the bare, stiff stem make saffron thistle easy to distinguish from the pink flowered Californian, Scotch and nodding thistle common in Canterbury.

If it is allowed to establish it can form dense stands, which restrict stock movement and compete with pasture species, reducing carrying capacity. Saffron thistle also has the potential to greatly reduce yields in cropping situations.

Saffron thistle is known to infest seven properties in the north of the region, three of these properties are in the Waikari pest district. Inspections are carried out in December and January every year. Any plants found at the time of these inspections are grubbed and the flower heads are removed.

For further information or if you find a plant you believe may be saffron thistle please contact your local biosecurity officer.

Old man's beard

There are a considerable number of properties in the Waikari pest district where old man's beard can be found. Please help stop the spread of this pest.

Old man's beard is a threat to forests, reserves, flood protection, plantings and gardens. It is a vigorous growing vine, which forms a tangled smothering mass over trees and shrubs, blocking out light and eventually killing supporting plants. Old man's beard is a deciduous vine.

This plant is particularly rewarding to control as the elimination of one root system can remove many metres of vine.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy (2005) requires land occupiers to control their old man's beard. 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, which you suspect may be old man's beard, please contact Biosecurity staff for identification and ways to control this fast growing plant.

Green waste - disposing of your undesirables

Why do people weed?

The most likely answer is to remove undesirable plants, also known as green waste, from their property.

What makes up green waste?

Green waste is made up of plants that are undesirable for various reasons. This includes plant cuttings and more importantly, aggressive plants which are those that have a tendency to take over, are hard to kill, and seed or reproduce prolifically.

Rampant old man's beard - possibly the result of green waste dumping

This group is the real threat to our environment when dumped in uncontrolled surroundings like creeks, riverbeds and wasteland where they continue their weedy habits. The list of plants in Canterbury that threaten our environment is very long. It includes ivy, German ivy, old man's beard, periwinkle, Mexican daisy, buddleia, boneseed, montbretia, gunnera tinctoria and Japanese honeysuckle.

The list of garden escapees, which have successfully established themselves, is growing.

The pest plants we are seeing in our environment are only the tip of the iceberg as far as the potential for spread goes.

While no-one disputes a person's right to grow plants of their choice in their garden (except for pest plants declared unwanted organisms or restricted plants), that right must come with a responsibility to ensure that when the plants are no longer wanted, they are disposed of in such a way that they do not become the old man's beard or boneseed of the future.

Disposing of undesirable plants in a way that does not allow them to pollute the environment is important.

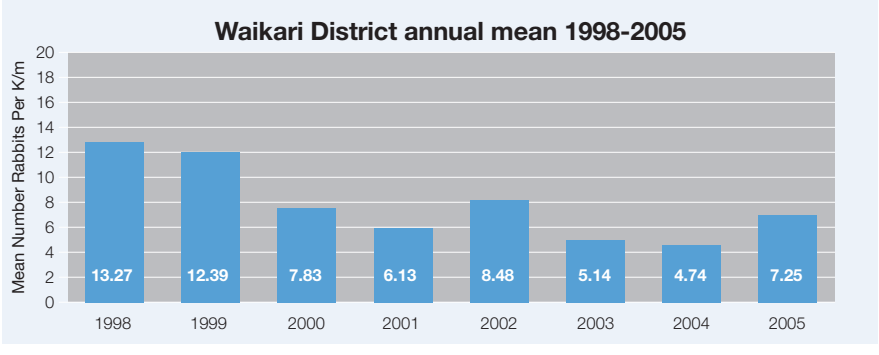
There are green waste disposal areas at some recycling centres and at dumps at a cost. The irresponsible choose to save themselves $10 - $20 by taking their rubbish to the first spot they can find where they are not likely to be seen dumping it.

Another group seems to believe that they are doing no harm by dumping green waste because it 'breaks down' and isn't going to be unsightly or damaging. What they don't realise is that these plants and cuttings will behave exactly the same way in the wild as they do in the garden. This is what makes them such a threat to the environment.

Please think about the damage you may be causing. If you cannot compost your garden waste on your own property, please do not dump it in a riverbed.

Canterbury regional rabbit trends - 2005

This year is the first since the illegal introduction of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in 1997 that landowners have been given notice under the Biosecurity act 1993 that rabbit numbers on their land exceeds the Environment Canterbury's RPMS trigger level (level three and increasing on the modified McLean scale). Level three on this scale is about ten rabbits per kilometre.



There are currently six pest districts in the Canterbury region where some individual properties show high rabbit numbers coupled with high levels of immunity to RHD.

They are Kurow, Mackenzie, Ashley, Waikari, Amuri and Kaikoura.

The Waikari pest district mean at 7.25 rabbits per kilometre of transect is the highest throughout the region's eleven pest districts.

Although RHD is generally keeping rabbit numbers down, it seems that the rabbit virus has had minimal impact in some areas.

Four properties have been issued with a "Notice of Direction" requiring landowners to reduce rabbit numbers to meet RPMS requirements.

All of those properties have initiated rabbit control measures, most have committed to poison operations and although not all have been undertaken at this stage those that are, have returned excellent rabbit reductions.

Inspections are presently underway to check on other control operations.

It is imperative that landowners are proactive in their rabbit control measures if they wish to keep numbers down.

All data in this report is from motorcycle nightcount transects. These transects are monitored at a district level and are completed annually, normally in early spring before access difficulties arise with lambing.

The majority of transects this year were monitored slightly later, between September and December of 2005. Although this period covers the main seasonal breeding pulse of rabbits, the data in this report does not reflect the annual peak rabbit population, as many kittens are underground in breeding stops or still being carried as monitoring is undertaken.

This information is from the 2005 Regional Rabbit Trend Report prepared by Brent Glentworth, Southern Biosecurity Team Leader.

Bovine Tb control progress in the Waikari Pest District

Waikari movement control herds (at 1st July 2006)			
	Cattle	Deer	Total
October 2002	16	8	24
January 2003	18	12	30
June 2003	12	9	21
October 2003	9	11	20
January 2005	15	7	22
June 2005	10	4	14
August 2005	10	4	14
March 2006	8	5	13
June 2006	3	7	10

Steady progress is being made with the control of Bovine Tb in the Waikari district. As the number of infected herds decreases the reduction is slower in eradicating infection from long-term herds.

The 2005-06 possum control programme has been completed in accordance with all contract specifications. The contract targets have got tougher as possum operations get older.

The 2005-06 ferret control programme has been completed. Numbers caught in the low rabbit prone areas are very low, but in the high rabbit prone areas numbers caught are a lot higher than in any other year.

In any area in North Canterbury where rabbit numbers are high, so too are the ferret numbers and our trapping programmes have little effect in reducing ferret numbers from year to year.

Controlling rabbits also controls ferrets.

For the 2006-07 programme, the money available for Canterbury has been reduced so as a result the Vector Control Programme will become more targeted into our problem areas. Operations that are Tb free and with low vector numbers do not need to be controlled every year and will end up on a bi – annual control cycle.

The programme for Waikari for the 2006-07 financial year is:

Blythe Valley	Complete possum and ferret control
Castle	Targeted possum and ferret control
Cloudy Hills	Targeted possum control
Doctors Hills	Targeted possum and ferret control
Hawarden Basin	Targeted ferret control
McDonald Downs	No control
Moores	No control
Motunau	Targeted possum and ferret control
Mt Cass	Complete possum and ferret control
Overton	Targeted possum and ferret control
Scargill	Targeted possum and ferret control
Virginia Road	Targeted possum control
Waitohi Gorge	Complete possum control
Waitohi River	Targeted possum and ferret control

The contracts for these operations have been awarded.

2005-06 vector tallies				
Operation	Ferret	Possum	Stoat	Feral Cat
Totals	504	606	165	507

As a result of the ferret control work undertaken in the 2004-05 season, 402 ferrets were tested. Two of these (0.5 %) were confirmed as having Tb. In the 2003-04 year, 321 ferrets were tested. Eleven (3.4 %) were confirmed as having Tb. This is a great result for the Waikari area.

Environment Canterbury is using feral pigs in a number of key areas in North Canterbury to detect the presence of Tb.

Movement control herds - Northern Region			
	Cattle	Deer	District Totals
Kaikoura	5	1	6
Amuri	4	1	5
Waikari	3	7	10
Ashley	0	2	2
Region Totals	12	11	23

This information is from the Waikari Pest District Bovine Tb Summary to June 2006 by Phillip Spencer, North Canterbury contracts manager.

Environment Canterbury Waikari district biosecurity staff

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Phillip Spencer	TB Management Officer	Ph. 03 314-7034

Your Representatives

Waikari District Pest Management Liaison Committee

The committee meets two or three times a year to discuss plant and animal pest issues and makes recommendations that will assist Environment Canterbury in managing plant and animal pest matters.

Your representatives on the Committee are:

Harry Pawsey, Chairperson, Graham Gibb, Ted Phipps, Kevin Earl, Ian Ferguson, Malcom Gilbert, Nigel Fraser, Brian Hansen, Robin Gardiner, Mark Crean and Jock Foster.

Environment Canterbury Councillor and Pest Portfolio Chairman Robert Johnston and Councillor Ross Little also attend committee meetings.

Pay us an e-visit

Copies of this and past issues of this newsletter 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

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