

More education on pests needed



By Gary Doyle, Chair
Selwyn Pest Management Liaison
Committee

It is my opinion that more education about the problems that can arise from pests being introduced into New Zealand is needed. On a recent trip to South Africa I saw the problems that are being experienced with Chromolaena, or Triffid Weed as it is known locally. We

have similar problems here but if you were to ask people in the street to name ten pest plants, animals or insects, they would be hard pushed to get past five. We need to get to the children and educate them, they are not only our future but they will soak up the data more readily than most adults. So here is the challenge: How do we reach this important section of our population?

Our three big concerns

In this issue there is a segment on controlling gorse and broom. If ever there were two plants that should never have been allowed past immigration it is these two. Nassella tussock is another one, of course.

The Selwyn pest committee has noticed this year that there are a large number of people new to the land, who are unable to identify nassella tussock and do not know about the threat it poses.

I encourage all landholders to start planning for controlling gorse, broom and nassella now before the plants have a chance to seed. Also please keep an eye out for new infestations particularly of nassella.

Keep an eye out for saffron thistle

The name might sound a little bit spicy but the plant is most definitely not desirable. Environment Canterbury is asking people in the Selwyn Pest District to keep an eye out for the plant pest saffron thistle. The plant is limited to five active sites scattered across approximately 378 hectares of land mainly north of the Rakaia River. This plant is a total control plant which means the site needs to be monitored and visited regularly to prevent plants from seeding. Environment Canterbury staff will do this work at no charge to the landowner. It is a multiple-branched annual or biennial plant with rigid, erect stems and small yellow flowers. The aim of the Regional pest management strategy is to destroy all saffron thistle plants within the Canterbury region before they produce viable seed.



Committees' work invaluable

Councillor Eugenie Sage,
Pest Portfolio chair and
Selwyn/Banks Peninsula
councillor

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.

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

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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 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.

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 (many 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.

Selwyn rabbits remain in low numbers

From the Canterbury Regional Rabbit Trends Report 2007



Rabbit numbers in the Selwyn Pest District show a slight reduction from 1.85 in 2006 to 1.56 rabbits per kilometre for 2007. This reflects a low and stable rabbit population.

Since monitoring began in 1993 the peak rabbit average was 4.1 per kilometre, which occurred in 1997 before the introduction of RCV. It seems that RCV epidemics, as well as changes in land use and possibly some secondary control by landowners continue to keep the rabbit population low. The trend figures are derived from comparing each year's 146 kilometres of pre-determined transect over seven properties.



Counting rabbits

Rabbit populations are monitored by spotlight night counts, which provide an indication of rabbit abundance. Counts are undertaken in early spring along 120 routes located in rabbit prone areas. These cover nearly 2400 km on 158 properties. The counts provide a snapshot in time of the lowest rabbit population level over a 12 month cycle. The measure is expressed in rabbits sighted per km, and results are compared over time.

Where is Selwyn?

The Selwyn pest district is the land between the Rakaia and Waimakariri Rivers and Gebbies Pass to Arthurs Pass. It also includes the rural areas within the Christchurch City Council area.

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?

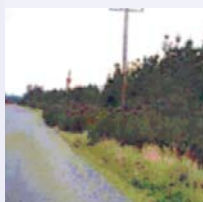
Boundaries

- 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).

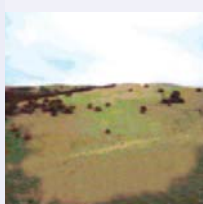
Landholders are not required under the RPMS to eradicate block gorse and broom infestations. (These are infestations greater than 50m²). However any extra work is recognised and appreciated by Environment Canterbury and the community.



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 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 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. A recent release in the district was an agent for boneseed on the Port Hills, the leafroller caterpillar.



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 Selwyn 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 (commonly referred to as the nucleus area) followed by Banks Peninsula and the Rakaia River catchment.

It 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 stated objective for nassella tussock is to: "progressively reduce the population of nassella tussock within the Canterbury region."

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Nassella night-out a success

Environment Canterbury is pleased with the mid-weeknight turnout to its nassella tussock field day in the West Melton area in January.

"Of the thirty people who attended for "hands-on" experience in identifying and controlling the pest, almost half were local landowners," said Environment Canterbury's Central Area Biosecurity Teamleader, Rob McCaw.

"Most had no experience of the plant but were pleased to be forewarned and prepared," he said.

The field day was held because of the discovery of an infestation of the notorious plant pest on several properties in the West Melton area.

"It is very important that landowners get to know the difference between nassella and more common tussocks. Anyone can call Environment Canterbury for identification. We don't mind false alarms," Rob said.

"Hands on learning is the best way to become familiar with nassella tussock," said Selwyn pest management liaison committee member, Sally Tripp.

"There was opportunity to see the plant first hand, and to ask questions. Grubbing out the plants with a group of people also made short work of the task and it was fun to work alongside others. It was encouraging to see the interest of landowners and this gives committee members confidence that they will be better informed about problem weeds," she said.

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

The Biosecurity Manager, Graham Sullivan, is responsible for implementing the Regional Pest Management Strategy. Phone 03 684 0535. The biosecurity section is organised into three teams: Northern, Central and Southern. The Selwyn 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.

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