

Garden dumping threatens valuable natural areas



Green waste, dumped over a bank close to waterway. Note: Old Man's Beard growing and seeding in the right foreground. It probably became established from illegal garden dumping. Photo: (Judith Earl-Goulet)

Unbelievable as it might seem, there are people who choose some of Canterbury's more secluded areas to dispose of excess green waste from their gardens. Presumably they think it'll rot down harmlessly and that's an end to it. Unfortunately they are wrong.

Illegally dumped green waste often contains a variety of plants that have become all too successful in home gardens. This can mean that they establish quickly and spread easily to take over sensitive environments like riverbeds, beaches, native bush areas or wetlands.

Three-quarters of New Zealand's problem weeds are garden escapees, often from plant material dumped in our green spaces.

The Department of Conservation conducted research in dune areas where garden dumping was permitted. The research revealed that many plants did not compost down and an astonishing 249 species were found to have made themselves at home in the sand. Similar results might be expected if the research was to focus on other natural areas. Effects of garden dumping can be seen in too many gullies or on riverbanks.

You can help prevent this happening to your favourite places by making sure you dispose of green waste at one of your local transfer stations or for small amounts, use your kerbside green waste bin.

For gardeners who have room on their section, a well managed compost heap can ensure weed material breaks down properly and makes a useful soil improver from the waste, **but please don't burn it in any residential area.**

If you see anyone who looks like they are dumping illegally, don't put yourself at risk by confronting them, write down the vehicle license plate and report the incident to the Ashburton District Council.

Finally, consider carefully what plants you buy for your garden, pond or aquarium. Never dump aquarium water or contents down drains or into waterways, your small oxygen weed may become the next threat to our waterways.

Locations of transfer stations in the Ashburton District:

Resource Recovery Services, Ashburton Resource Recovery Park, Range Street, Ashburton (*recycling and residual waste*)

Rakaia Resource Recovery Park, cnr West Town Belt and Rakaia Terrace, Rakaia (*recycling and residual waste*)

Methven Resource Recovery Park, Vaughans Road, Methven (*inert material and green waste*)

Ashburton Pest Management Liaison Committee members

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Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy, mid-point review update

On 30 June 2010, Environment Canterbury published the results of the mid-point review of the Strategy. It recommends that the Strategy should remain largely unchanged, confirming that it continues to provide the appropriate framework for the efficient and effective management of plant and animal pests in Canterbury.

Stephen Hall, Environment Canterbury programme manager pests and biodiversity, says that there has been a great deal of direct and implicit support for the strategy from the principal users of the strategy, namely the Pest Management Liaison Committees.

"The committees represent the rural ratepayers who work alongside Environment Canterbury biosecurity staff at the forefront of pest control under the strategy."

"One significant change is proposed, with the recommendation that Chilean Needle Grass be included as a pest. This recognises the potential threat posed by this invasive grass in a region where agriculture makes the single largest contribution to the economy," said Mr Hall.

The next scheduled review is in 2014 unless there is a need to do so earlier.

A review report on the statutory mid-point review of the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy 2005-2015 is now available at www.ecan.govt.nz.

Pest News

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

A few words from Robin Grigg, Pest Committee Chair

Spring has sprung and a fresh crop of weeds and pests takes the field.

Rabbit numbers are slowly building up, but it is a fair bet that with the removal of hedges on the plains, the rabbit problem should reduce locally. The other positive of the steel irrigators is that there should be much less spread of barleygrass, noddies and broom, which used to hitch a ride in the irrigation races and out onto the border-dykes.

Other good news is that Environment Canterbury carried out a major wilding pine clearance programme in the hills of the Ashburton district this past winter. The high country is looking noticeably clear of pines, in contrast to most other high country areas of Canterbury. The challenge for us all is to keep the area clear.

Environment Canterbury is working with DOC on the programme to protect birds in parts of the Ashburton River again this year, and if the impact of the programme over the past few years is an indicator, we can expect to see a continuing recovery in the wrybill plover population. This year's programme has concentrated on feral cats and ferrets, and it is encouraging to see that on the upper river, a volunteer group is going to keep the trapping going longer.

The committee is pushing Environment Canterbury for greater control of wallabies in South Canterbury so that their problem doesn't become our problem.

As the Ashburton pest committee chairman, I will be giving evidence in support of Environment Canterbury's application for a regionwide consent to apply 1080. The pest committees asked for this regionwide consent in order to help farmers deal with build-ups of rabbits.

This is a necessarily brief take on what our local pest liaison committee is up to. The committee will be calling for fresh nominations to the committee for the next 3 years. Anyone interested, please get in touch.

Committee member contact details are on the back of this newsletter.

Chilean needle grass (*Nassella neesiana*)



Chilean needle grass (CNG) is from the same genus as nassella tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*). However, visually it is quite a different plant, growing up to 1 metre tall and looking more like a grass than a tussock. Its rough-edged leaves are lime green in colour, up to 5mm wide and ribbed on the upper surface. It also produces and disperses seed differently to nassella tussock.

Seed heads are distinctly purple and much bigger and heavier than on nassella panicles, giving plants a characteristic drooping purple flower head. Each seed is up to 10mm long with hard, sharply-pointed heads and a long, hair-like awn about 70mm long. Seed can also be found hidden in the stem at the leaf nodes and at the base of the plant.

Because the seed is heavy, it falls mainly near the parent plant and dispersal is mostly through catching onto animals, clothing and machinery.

CNG seeds prolifically and can displace pasture and native vegetation. When in seed, it is unpalatable to stock, reducing the available grazing during this period. The sharp seeds cause serious damage to livestock and can penetrate hides, contaminate fleeces and devalue carcasses.

Once biosecurity officers based in Hurunui become aware of its presence, a restricted-place management programme was put in place in the infected area. This means that all people, animals, product and vehicles leaving the affected area are to be checked and cleaned of seed. The local Hurunui community was informed of the threat from CNG and how to identify it and minimise the risk of spread. Since CNG was discovered, Environment Canterbury Biosecurity staff have maintained an annual control programme at the known site and are undertaking a systematic search programme of high-risk properties in the region.

WILDING PINES:

Protecting Canterbury's biodiversity

Environment Canterbury is working in collaboration with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and some affected landowners to control wilding pines within Canterbury's ecologically sensitive high-country. Staff from both organisations recognise the cost and other benefits of working together.

The control of wilding pines is not an easy task. Some more remote and hard-to-access sites require helicopter skid work. This is the most cost-effective method available for such sites. To view skid work in action visit www.bushtelly.co.nz.

The cost of controlling a single pine can vary depending on its size and location, which is why it is so important to control them when small - when they are easier to remove and haven't yet produced seed.

Pines tend to start coning from about 5-10 years old, depending on the species. Controlling of mature cone bearing plants on "take off" points (high ridgelines) are priority sites for control to occur in the programme.

Control work is strategic and concentrates on mature coning trees first as a potential source of further spread. This will sometimes leave scattered immature trees in the same area. These are of a lesser priority and will be controlled at a later stage. By selecting target trees in this way, seed is less likely to reach new or previously controlled sites.



Chain-sawing of mature pine. The wilding pine control project requires specialist contractors.

The wilding pine control project requires specialist contractors. However, the work of volunteers from our communities is essential in supporting the programme. Volunteers are able to control small seedlings in newly infested areas, freeing up the contractors to target more challenging areas.

Environment Canterbury's volunteer days contact is James Hoban, Resource Care Co-ordinator. He can be contacted on 03 371 7182 or james.hoban@ecan.govt.nz

Wandering wallabies

Occasional sightings of isolated wallabies have been received from outside the South Canterbury containment zone (see map), around Ashburton's Mount Pot area. If these sightings are confirmed, it would suggest that wallabies are being released illegally there.

If wallabies were to become established in the Ashburton district it could have a significant impact on the pastoral economy and on native biodiversity.

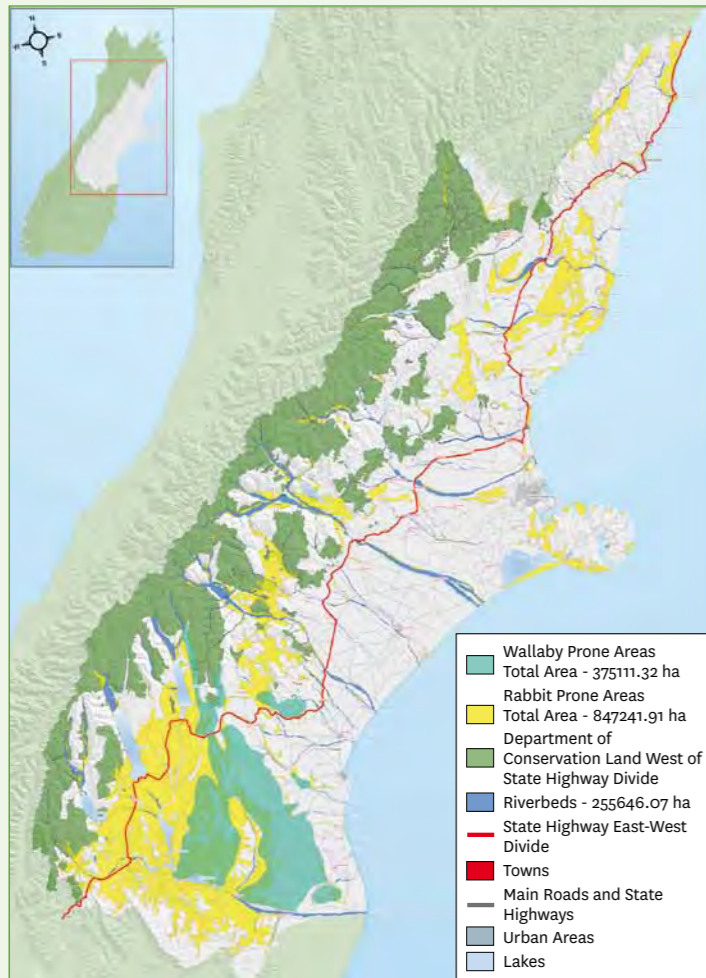
Wallabies crop vegetation very close to the ground, creating bare patches which then allow the soil to be eroded by wind and rain, reducing water quality as sediment-laden run-off enters waterways.

They can damage low lying native vegetation and prevent native bush from regenerating. Exotic tree plantations are also vulnerable to wallaby damage when young and there is evidence of wallabies grazing on green feed crops, particularly when there is suitable cover nearby. One wallaby can consume the same amount of feed as a sheep.

Land occupiers must notify Environment Canterbury in writing of the presence of wallabies on land outside the Wallaby Containment Area within 10 working days.

It is an offence to keep wallabies as pets or release them outside of the containment zone.

If you see wallabies in the Ashburton area, please contact Biosecurity staff urgently.



Rabbit and Wallaby prone areas in Canterbury

RABBITS: Down, but not out

Rabbit infestations can threaten the viability of farming, particularly in semi-arid areas, because rabbits compete with stock for feed and cause soil erosion by overgrazing and digging.

Monitoring from spring 2009 showed that rabbit numbers had fallen in eight of the eleven pest districts, thanks largely to effective control work by landowners.

The Amuri and Waikari pest districts showed small increases in numbers but they were the only two districts that had shown reductions in the previous year. Although rabbit numbers have been reduced across the rabbit-prone Mackenzie, Omarama and Kurow districts, they remain significantly higher than in the last decade. The best way to build on recent successes is to ensure control operations are effective through meeting industry standards.

On average, 62% of monitored rabbit populations now show immunity to rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD), meaning resistance is on the increase. It is now more important than ever to employ integrated control methods including shooting and targeted poisoning.

Rabbit numbers for part of the Ashburton Pest District are estimated by surveying along transects. Four of these are in the foothill high country and one is on the coast. All five have shown rabbit reductions of more than 50%, with the district mean dropping by a substantial 3.75 rabbits per kilometre to 1.5 rabbits per kilometre for spring 2009.

The inspection process throughout the Ashburton plains, where we have no transects, indicates low rabbit levels. Landowner-initiated control, most probably on a recreational basis, change in farm land use to dairy and RHD epidemics are still combining effectively to curb any population increase at this stage.



Live rabbits trying to get over a rabbit-proof fence.

Nodding thistle

This prickly plant pest is being featured again at the request of Ashburton's Pest Liaison Committee because locals are concerned about nodding thistle spread in Ashburton.

If left to establish, nodding thistle can be very difficult to eradicate. As a landowner/occupier you are legally required to clear all nodding thistle 40m back from neighbouring boundaries and 40m back from stock water and irrigation races to prevent further spread of this pest plant.



IMPORTANT NOTES:

Infested areas need to be checked at least twice yearly to ensure that plants do not seed.

Contact your local agrichemical supplier for information on the best chemical for controlling nodding thistle in your area. When using any herbicide **PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY** to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

Recommended Control methods

Isolated plants:

Grub out, removing at least 5cm of taproot, or spot-treat with herbicide.

Larger infestations:

- Graze area prior to spraying to help expose seedlings.
- Spot spray or grub the mature plants because broadcast spraying doesn't kill them.
- Broadcast spray during late autumn while plants are in the rosette phase of growth to kill seedlings and small plants.
- Follow up broadcast spraying several weeks later with spot spraying or grubbing to catch late germinating or missed plants.

Ongoing site management options:

- Keep a tight sward of grass by preventing overgrazing in summer to reduce germination and to suppress seedling development.
- Renew pasture to germinate a large proportion of the dormant seed, allowing easy control.
- Purchase certified seed and hay from nodding thistle free areas if possible, especially if your property is currently free of this pest.

Boundary weed control check list for containing pest plants

Pest	To Do list	
Gorse and Broom	No gorse or broom plants present within 10m of neighbouring boundaries (where the neighbouring boundary is clear/being cleared of gorse and broom) Gorse and Broom boundary hedges trimmed tops and sides	✓
Nodding Thistle	No nodding thistle present within 40m of neighbouring boundaries No nodding thistle present within 40m of stock water and irrigation races	✓
Ragwort	No ragwort present within 40m of neighbouring boundaries No ragwort present within 40m of stock water and irrigation races	✓
Old Man's Beard	No Old Man's Beard plants within 20m of neighbouring boundaries	✓

If you can tick all of the above, you are meeting your landowner's obligation for boundary weed.

REMEMBER: Scattered gorse, broom and Old Man's Beard plants need doing too! Boundaries include roadsides 10m from centre of road.