

Wandering wallabies

Environment Canterbury would like to hear of any sightings of wallabies in North Canterbury. Reports have been received of wallabies on Banks Peninsula, at Mt Oxford and in other areas of Canterbury. Sightings outside of the South Canterbury containment zone suggest that animals are being illegally released. It is an offence to release a wallaby or to keep one as a pet.

Wallabies outside the containment zone pose a real threat to the pastoral economy and to native biodiversity. They feed mainly on grasses and herbs, cropping vegetation very close to the ground. This creates bare patches which then allow the soil to be eroded by wind and rain.

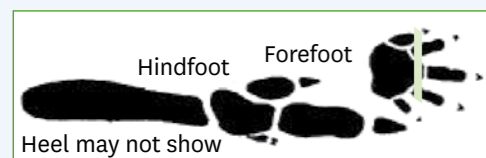
Exotic tree plantations are vulnerable to wallaby damage during the establishment stage and there is evidence of wallabies grazing on green feed crops, particularly when there is suitable cover nearby. Wallabies also prevent the regeneration of native bush by damaging the forest understorey when they are present in sufficient numbers.

One animal can eat the same amount as an average breeding ewe.

At low population densities, scat (droppings) and footprints are good ways to detect the presence of wallabies.

If you suspect you may have wallabies on your property, looking for 'sign' is a good way to confirm their presence.

Please contact your local Biosecurity Officer at Amberley to report wallaby sign or a sighting.



Wallaby tracks are wide and flat. The hind foot leaves a print quite distinct from any other animal track you are likely to find in New Zealand.



Wallaby scat (droppings) is ovate in shape, dry and fibrous.

Have you seen this plant?

Darwin's barberry (*Berberis darwinii*) is a spiny, evergreen shrub that can grow up to about 4 metres high. It can be found on forest and bush margins, sometimes in pasture and in ungrazed areas. Darwin's barberry has small clusters of glossy dark green leaves up to 3 centimetres long, with spiny edges. Small yellow-orange flowers are produced in clusters from September through to February. The flowers are followed by hanging groups of purple-black berries, which are a very popular food source for birds and consequently lead to the further spread of Darwin's barberry.

There are only a handful of known sites in Canterbury north of the Waimakariri River. Please inform Environment Canterbury's Biosecurity staff if you think you have seen this plant. Contact your local Biosecurity Officer at Amberley to report your sighting. Don't bring samples into the office as this risks spreading it further.



The bright green leaves and yellow-orange buds (left) and flowers (right) of Darwin's barberry

Ashley Biosecurity Staff members

Laurence Smith
Biosecurity Team Leader
 Ph: 03 314 9035

James Kilgour, Biosecurity Officer
 Ph: 03 314 9583

Leanne Lye
Biosecurity Support Officer
 Ph: 03 314 8014

Terry Charles
Biosecurity Officer (Rabbits)
 Ph: 03 314 8403

Peter Morgan, Biosecurity Officer
 Ph: 03 314 9584

Ashley Pest Management Liaison Committee members

Ian Ford
(Chairperson)
 Ph 03 314 4319

Allan Feary
 Ph 03 312 4278

Neil Cruickshank
(WDC Rep)
 Ph 03 313 1513

John Acton-Adams
 Ph 03 314 8062

Lyndon Morris
 Ph 03 312 8706

Duncan Lundy
 Ph 03 312 8774

Andrew Stokes
 Ph 03 312 4285

Representing your pest district

The Ashley committee would like representative/s from the eastern part of the pest district, towards the coast. (The Pest District is bounded by the Waipara River to the north and the Waimakariri River to the south). If you have an interest in pest management issues and would like to become a member of your Ashley committee please contact either Laurence Smith or Ian Ford (details above).

Pest News

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

A few words from Ian Ford, Pest Committee Chair

As chairman of the Ashley Pest Management Liaison Committee, I welcome you to this edition of Pest News and hope that you will find it interesting and informative.

A major benefit of the very wet winter and early spring has been to help keep rabbit numbers down, so that populations in most parts of the district will be at acceptable levels.

Tb infected cattle and deer herds are also at very low levels in the Ashley pest district and current operations are working towards proving the area is free of Tb vectors. If this is confirmed, the Animal Health Board will withdraw from any further possum or ferret control and it will be up to the district to decide if they want to fund a programme to maintain the possum population at a low level.

Recently, a letter was sent to all property owners and land occupiers in the Waimakariri part of the Ashley pest district to remind them of their obligations to clear their roadsides of gorse, broom and old man's beard. In case you missed it, a summary can be found on this front page.

Broom is flowering prolifically at the moment, so now is a good time to carry out chemical controls on broom and other noxious weeds. It's a good time too to control the old man's beard that grows mainly in riverbeds and on wasteland, before it sets seed.

The western high country of our district has a wilding conifer problem and you can read more about why, and what's being done about it later in this newsletter. Anything you can do to help with control would be a positive.

Two wallaby sightings in our district have been reported during the past year, which is of particular concern so far outside their South Canterbury containment zone.

Publicity over the past two years about Chilean needle grass being found near Spotswood raises concern that it could spread to our district. Look out for it between November and March when it is easier to identify. Please report any sightings to a biosecurity officer immediately.

We are fortunate to have a motivated team of biosecurity officers based in Amberley whose job it is to limit the spread of pests and prevent new threats from establishing.

Don't forget your roadside



Uncontrolled roadside broom

In February each year, Environment Canterbury inspects selected roadsides in the Waimakariri District at the request of the Ashley Pest Management Liaison Committee. This is to check that all roadside plant pests are being controlled satisfactorily.

It is the responsibility of the adjacent land occupier to control gorse, broom and old man's beard, from the centre line of the road into the property. It is important that land occupiers know their responsibilities and for that reason, Environment Canterbury's Biosecurity staff include a reminder letter with Waimakariri District Council rate invoices each year.

All three pests must be controlled a set distance into a property from the boundary prior to 31 January each year. The specified distance for gorse and broom is 10 metres and for old man's beard is 20 metres.

Gorse and broom hedges are allowed, providing they are trimmed each year before seed dispersal. (Please remember that scattered plants in a fence line do not constitute a hedge).

Getting a grip on old man's beard Control tips



Old man's beard was bought to New Zealand from Europe many years ago as an ornamental garden plant. The vine has flourished and become a major problem in parts of Canterbury.

Old man's beard control can be rewarding, as the removal of one root system can destroy many metres of vine. Cutting and stump treating can be done throughout most of the year with successful results.

How to go about controlling Old Man's Beard:

- Cut all vines at waist height (vines left touching the ground will restrike).
- Trace vines back to the ground and clear around the root system.
- Cut vines as close to the base of the plant as possible.
- Treat cut stumps immediately with herbicide.
- Leave hanging vine in the trees to break down.
- Follow up after 2-3 weeks to pick up any vines missed. Uncut vines will be obvious as the leaves won't have wilted. (If plants are bare at the time of control, you will need to check later to ensure that there are no new leaves).
- Revisit sites each year to pick up any seedlings. These are easily pulled by hand.

Effective control of vines scrambling across the ground can be achieved by spraying, providing the plant is actively growing.

Contact your local agrichemical supplier for advice on which chemical will best suit your requirements. When using any herbicide PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

If you have, or think you have old man's beard on your property, would like a plant identified or need further advice on how to carry out control work please contact a Biosecurity Officer at Environment Canterbury's Amberley Office.

CHILEAN NEEDLE GRASS *Nassella neesiana*

Chilean needle grass (*Nassella neesiana*) or CNG was first recorded in New Zealand in the 1930s. There are only two known 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 spread in hay, by stock, people or vehicle movement.

A routine inspection as part of Environment Canterbury's pest surveillance programme in November 2008 found the first incidence of Chilean needle grass in Canterbury. The plant was found growing at a vineyard at Spotswood just north of Cheviot. A thorough search of the area by Biosecurity staff found the infestation covered more 70 hectares with a handful of isolated patches nearby.

Difficult to identify, Chilean needle grass blends in well with other pasture grasses particularly in the spring growth period. CNG leaves are bright green, ribbed on the upper surface and rough to the touch. The plant becomes more distinctive during flowering and seeding when seedheads have a purplish tinge and the seed has a distinctive long twisting tail.

Chilean needle grass is unpalatable to stock when seeding and forms dense stands in pasture, dramatically reducing productivity after only a few years. The seed is extremely sharp and hairy and so catches in the pelt of passing animals. The seed tail has a corkscrew shape and so is difficult to remove. Like barley grass, the seed can work its way into tissue, causing abscessing and downgrading hides and carcasses.

Chilean needle grass is extremely difficult to eradicate once established and so strict containment processes have been put in place at Spotswood to prevent spread from the area.

So far this season Biosecurity staff have grubbed and sprayed the main sites at Spotswood. Further searches will be carried out around the area over coming months and follow-up control work undertaken as needed.

If you have found a plant on your property which you think may be Chilean needle grass please contact Environment Canterbury's Amberley Office Phone 03 314 8014. Do not bring in any samples for identification as this may increase the risk of spread.



Wilding conifer control update

Wilding conifers are trees that occur through wind-spread seed falling outside areas of managed trees. Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), Mountain pine (*P. mugo*), Corsican pine (*P. nigra*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) all occur as wilding conifers. In areas of Canterbury such as Craigieburn and Lake Pukaki, thousands of hectares of tussock grassland are infested with an almost blanket cover of wilding conifers of various ages.

Careful site selection for new conifer plantations is a must in order to prevent the spread of wilding conifers in future. Douglas fir in particular shows a clear tendency to take over clean tussock country. It is also of major concern because of its shade tolerance - it can germinate and grow under a native canopy and can out-compete native trees, making it a particular threat to biodiversity.

In North Canterbury between the Waimakariri River and Canterbury's northern boundary, wilding conifers have become established and are now present in large numbers, making control work a major undertaking.

Environment Canterbury maintains a close working relationship with the Department of Conservation and local land occupiers throughout Canterbury for the control of wilding conifers. Work in the Hurunui district is planned to complement the programmes of all concerned parties.

Environment Canterbury began control operations in the Hurunui River Catchments in 2007 following consultation with all the local land occupiers concerned. On the south side of the Hurunui all planned work between Maori Gully and Lake Taylor was completed in 2008/09. All trees from large coning conifers (trees of seed producing size) right down to seedlings were removed. This was achieved mainly through 'skid-hopping', with contractors moving from tree to tree by helicopter.

Last year's programme on the north side of the Hurunui focused on land between the Jolly Brook and the Mandamus. This coming year's programme will see a continuation of work in the

Mandamus Catchment. The planned control operation is not as straight forward as last year with many of the isolated 'wildings' situated in dense native scrub cover, making ground and aerial access extremely difficult. Other control options are being considered for this work.

If you have wilding conifers on your property, don't wait until they are large and numerous enough to require a costly control programme. Start your control work now. Remember all plants that have become pests started from a few isolated plants and if dealt with at an early stage, their spread could so easily have been halted.



Controlling gorse and broom

Gorse and broom on your property should be controlled when plants are actively growing as they will take up applied chemicals readily. Ideally, plants should be treated when flowering, but before seed set.

The priorities for your control programme should be:

- **Clear boundaries** of all gorse and broom at least 10m back (where those boundaries are clear or being cleared of gorse and broom).
- **Focus on clearing scattered plants and small patches.** These are the biggest threat to your property.
- **Plan and work methodically** across the property, beginning with the least infested areas and working back towards block infestations.
- **Always control plants before they set seed** to prevent more seed being added to the seed bank.
- **Trim boundary hedges** (top back and sides) each year after flowering but before they set seed.



If you would like assistance in developing a gorse and broom control programme for your property or would like to discuss your current control program, please contact a Biosecurity Officer at Environment Canterbury's Amberley Office for advice.