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.

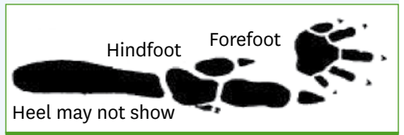
Exotic tree plantations are vulnerable to wallaby damage during the establishment stage and there is evidence of wallabies grazing on green feed crops, particularly when there is suitable cover nearby. Wallabies also prevent the regeneration of native bush by damaging the forest understorey when they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

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

At low population densities, scat (droppings) and foot prints 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 our Kaikoura office 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 our Kaikoura office 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

Kaikoura Biosecurity Staff members

Laurence Smith, Biosecurity Team Leader	Ph: 03 314 9035
Leanne Lye, Biosecurity Support Officer	Ph: 03 314 8014
Jan Crooks, Biosecurity Officer	Ph: 03 319 3236
Peter Adams, Biosecurity Officer	Ph: 03 319 7567
Terry Charles, Biosecurity Officer (Rabbits)	Ph: 03 314 8403

Kaikoura Pest Management Liaison Committee members

Mark Hislop ..... Ph 03 319 6267
Sandy Chaffey ..... Ph 03 575 8990
Graham Collins ..... Ph 03 319 5490
Bob Todhunter ..... Ph 03 575 8681
Kevin Smith ..... Ph 03 319 5403

Representing your pest district

If you have an interest in pest issues and would like to become a member of your Kaikoura committee please contact the Biosecurity Team Leader at the phone number above.

January 2011
KAIKOURA EDITION

Pest News

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

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.

Everything is connected

Environment Canterbury Regional Council
Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha

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 your local Biosecurity officer at Environment Canterbury's Kaikoura Office.

CHILEAN NEEDLE GRASS

Nassella neesiana

Chilean needle grass *(Nassella neesiana)* or CNG was first recorded in New Zealand in the 1930's. 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 Leanne Lye on 03 314 8014. Do not bring in any samples for identification as this may increase the risk of spread.

RABBIT CONTROL:

Best practice is cost effective

Whenever rabbit numbers increase throughout the rabbit-prone areas of Canterbury, many farmers use poison programmes to control numbers. However, a poison programme needs to kill 95% or more of the population to be cost efficient.

Affordability is of course a major factor in planning a poison programme, but failing to use poison at the right time has a cost too.

Delay can result in missing the annual seasonal window, increased bait requirements for a bigger rabbit population and an a larger area needing treatment as rabbits spread. Losses due to pasture damage and soil erosion affect productivity and may mean that supplementary feed is needed. All the above are expensive measures and all are avoidable through good planning.

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

THE GOLDEN RULES FOR A COST-EFFECTIVE POISON PROGRAMME.

- **Seasonal timing**
  Best results are achieved from March to August, outside of the breeding season and when natural feed is scarcest.
- **"Rest" your rabbit population**
  Stop shooting a good 3-4 months before poisoning. Wary rabbits don't take bait readily.
- **Work to a rabbit-proof boundary**
  Work to an effective rabbit-proof boundary and concentrate efforts where rabbit numbers are highest.
- **Use good quality bait and apply at the right intervals**
  Use fresh bait in good condition. With 1080, pre feed twice before using poison bait. Feeds should be around a week apart. If more than two weeks apart, a third light feed is best practice. Monitor bait disappearance.
- **Use ample bait when pre-feeding**
  Dominant animals feed first. If too little bait is available, some rabbits will survive. All areas need to be pre-fed at the correct rate so that all individuals can feed.
- **Ensure the correct toxic loading is used**
  It is an offence to alter labelled toxicity and sub-lethal dosing or poison shyness can result.
- **Consider a bait acceptance trial**
  This is especially important if you have a large treatment area or the cost is considerable.
- **Always use reputable contractors**

To summarise, employing best practice methods and getting the timing right are critical in maintaining efficient and cost effective rabbit control.

Remember that to purchase or apply poison to bait, you must hold a Controlled Substances License or an Approved Handlers Certificate or be under the direct supervision of a licence holder. Unless you have the above licenses, you are able to purchase Pindone-based products for use in bait stations only.

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 after 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 your local Biosecurity officer at Environment Canterbury's Kaikoura office for advice.