

# Garden dumping threatens valuable natural areas

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 also 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 your local 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.



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

### Selwyn Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

The Biosecurity Manager, Graham Sullivan is responsible for implementing the regional pest management strategy. Phone 03 687 7835.

The Central Area Team Leader is Rob McCaw and Biosecurity Officers are Gemma Livingstone, Stephen Brown and John Thacker. The team is based in Christchurch and can be reached on 03 365 3828.

### Selwyn Pest Management Liaison Committee members

- Mr Tim Sundstrum ..... 03 347 9479
- Mr Jim Macartney..... 03 329 6734
- Mr Andrew Gillanders ..... 03 318 8677
- Mr Allan Thorn ..... 03 318 1798
- Mr Peter Graham ..... 03 329 6637
- Mrs Sally Tripp ..... 03 329 9752
- Mr Jeremy Agar..... 03 328 9956
- Mr Marcel van Leeuwen..... 03 318 8311

# Pest News

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

## Tell us if you see purple loosestrife

**Environment Canterbury is asking Canterbury residents to look out for a pest plant called purple loosestrife over summer and report any sightings to Environment Canterbury's Potential Pest Line on (03) 363 9380.**

It is of concern to the region because it can form dense infestations that block drains and waterways, altering the habitat for native aquatic species.

Environment Canterbury Biosecurity officer Gemma Livingstone says that prevention or early detection are the best form of control for any pest.

"Public assistance with detection is an important element to the success of any pest control programme," she says.

Purple loosestrife is in flower any time from December to March. It is identifiable by its multiple pinkish/purple-coloured flowers on a long stalk. Each flower has 5 to 6 individual petals and its stems are square in cross section and ribbed. It is commonly found in damp places, such as wetlands and on the banks of rivers and lakes, as well as in gardens. Seed is usually spread by water or wind but birds and humans can also contribute to its spread.

Since 2003, Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation and the Christchurch City Council have worked together to curb the spread of purple loosestrife within Christchurch and the wider Canterbury region.

"We have eradicated it from a number of home garden and dry sites. For known 'wetter sites' such as those on the Avon River, the density of plants has been reduced considerably by the ongoing control programme.

"We need to keep the momentum going. Information from the public about new sites is needed to help us reach our long-term goal of full eradication from the region."



2004 Purple loosestrife infestation in Halswell drain (photo: Department of Conservation)



Purple loosestrife flowers & stems (photo: Department of Conservation)

## Nodding thistle

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 to reduce germination and to suppress seedling development, by preventing overgrazing in summer.
- Renew pasture, to germinate a large proportion of the dormant seed, allowing easy control.
- Purchase certified seed and hay from areas free of nodding thistle 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 obligations for boundary weed control.

**REMEMBER:** Scattered gorse, broom and old man's beard plants need doing too! Boundaries include roadsides 10m from centre of road.

## 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 infested 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.

## 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 Canterbury pest districts, thanks largely to effective control work by landowners. The best way to build on recent successes is to ensure control operations are effective through meeting industry standards.

On average, over 60% 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.

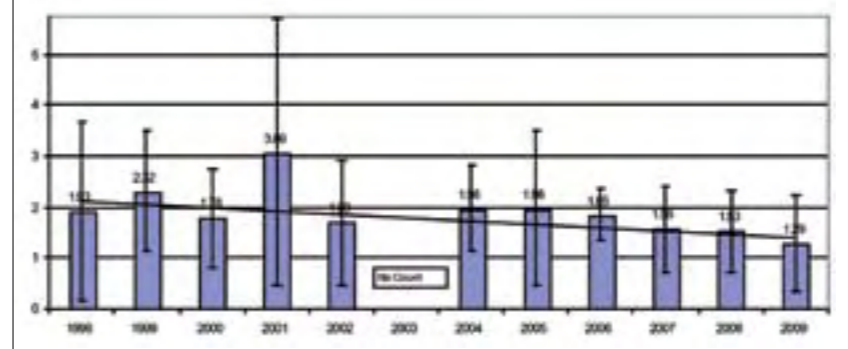
Landowner initiated control, most probably on a recreational basis, change in farm land use to dairy, and RHD epidemics are still combining effectively to curb any population increase at this stage.

### PLAINS/ SELWYN:

The Plains/Selwyn Pest District graph reflects a low and stable rabbit population. A reduction of 0.25 in the mean number of rabbits per kilometer to 1.29 rabbits per kilometer on average has been noted for 2009.

Daytime rabbit inspections of the foot hill country generally confirm low populations of rabbits under control at this stage. Land use on the majority of the plains does not create good rabbit habitat and so levels here also remain low. There have been anecdotal reports of RHD having an impact on some of these areas recently.

Plains/Selwyn District: Average number of rabbits/km (over 126.4km).



## Boneseed

Environment Canterbury's Biosecurity section has paid for contractors to undertake boneseed control in several areas during the past year.

Biosecurity officer & boneseed project leader, Stephen Brown, says that control operations have been carried out in Southshore & New Brighton areas by contractors.

"I have been pleased to see that local people are working at removing boneseed along Southshore and New Brighton in addition to the work being carried out by our contractors," he says.

"I would like to thank all those individuals who have been involved with this, it is much appreciated and your efforts have really made a difference."

Other locations where contractor work has been undertaken include Heathcote Valley close to the rail and motorway tunnel to Lyttelton, Mount Pleasant along roadsides, and in Allendale.



## Rabbits on lifestyle blocks

We have received a number of calls from lifestyle block owners in the Selwyn district this year voicing their concerns over high rabbit numbers. It is the owner/occupier of any property's responsibility to undertake rabbit control.

The challenge faced by small landowners is that rabbits don't respect boundaries. Where there is a problem, all neighbouring properties need to be working in a co-ordinated way - otherwise rabbits simply re-infest a controlled property from one where they have been left alone. The control methods need to be appropriate for the circumstances: shooting rabbits needs to be done with extra care where properties are close together and near roads.

### Some options:

- 1) Set up a neighbour/community group where land owners/occupiers who are happy to work together contribute towards the cost of a contractor to undertake a rabbit control programme on all of their properties.
- 2) Set up a Community Initiated Programme (CIP). This is where there is at least 75% agreement from members within a defined geographical area in the community that are affected by the pest problem. (e.g. Banks Peninsula has a CIP possum programme.) This means that those land owners/occupiers in the CIP area pay a specific rate to Environment Canterbury to organise a control programme in their area on their behalf. For more information and support in how to organise this, contact your local Pest Liaison Committee member listed on the back of this newsletter.
- 3) Act alone and only control the problem on your property. This is the least effective strategy and in the long run may be frustrating, costly and time consuming for the individual.

**For more information on lifestyle block animal pest control options visit [www.lifestyleblock.co.nz/pests.html](http://www.lifestyleblock.co.nz/pests.html)**



Rabbits trying to get over a rabbit-proof fence.