

Biosecurity Bites

WINTER 2021

Myrtle rust found in Christchurch

Myrtle rust is widespread across the North Island, West Coast and the top of the South Island and is expected to continue spreading. It's recently been found on a mature hedge in residential Christchurch, which marks a new southern point for this invasive fungal disease.

Environment Canterbury's biosecurity team completed a survey of the surrounding area, which didn't reveal any further infections. The team plan to undertake another survey in late spring when myrtle rust is more active. Previous sightings of myrtle rust in our region have been on plants purchased in nurseries in other regions and relocated to Christchurch.

The invasive myrtle rust affects plants of the myrtle species, which include both native and exotic species, such as pohutukawa, manuka, ramarama, feijoa and bottlebrush.

The disease reproduces rapidly and spreads via microscopic spores that can spread far and wide. It has a distinct yellow, powdery appearance that can sometimes turn to brown or grey in older infections. The rust prevents new plant growth and older plants eventually die, which poses a risk not only for our plant species, but also the wildlife that depend on these plants for food.

Biosecurity New Zealand is no longer collecting, analysing or reporting myrtle rust data. Targeted surveillance and control activities have ceased, and instead the focus is firmly on research to build further understanding of the fungal disease, and identify possible tools, treatments and future management options. There is also a focus on supporting landowners to minimise the impacts on their plants and provide advice on the myrtle rust website.

For more information go to www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/long-term-biosecurity-management-programmes/myrtle-rust/



HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you think you see signs of the disease on a myrtle plant, don't touch it. If you have a camera or mobile phone you can take a photo and submit it to the iNaturalist website on www.inaturalist.org/. Experts can then check to confirm whether your identification is correct.



Photo iNaturalist: Myrtle rust on Ramarama leaves.

Community volunteers join the fight against wilding conifers

Across three days in April and May, more than 70 volunteers took part in work to remove wilding conifers within the Mackenzie Basin and Craigieburn areas. In collaboration with the Mackenzie Basin Wilding Tree Trust, Barenbrug, High Country Contracting and Godfrey Pest Management, the volunteers worked to chop small, waist-height conifers down within designated areas.

They all did an excellent job, and after their hard work enjoyed a sausage sizzle and were given an overview of the ongoing work to remove these pest trees from throughout Canterbury as part of the wider National Wilding Conifer Control Programme.

The volunteer days were enjoyed by all who took part and further days are being planned for after winter. If your community or corporate organisation would like to join a volunteer day, please contact stephanie.mercer@ecan.govt.nz.



Photo top: Volunteers from plant breeding and research company Barenbrug enjoyed their work removing wilding conifers at Craigieburn.

Photo second from top: Volunteers hard at work removing conifers.



Photos above: Before and after volunteers removed wilding conifers.

Did you know?



Wilding conifers grow fast and tall, shading native plants out. Dense wilding conifer growth can lead to the extinction of native plant communities, the drying of wetlands and riparian areas, and impact native fauna through the loss of habitat.

Update on white-edged nightshade

White-edged nightshade is an invasive pest plant that is scattered across 650 hectares of farmland on Banks Peninsula, and adversely affects the economic well-being and environmental value of the land it occupies.

Characterised by its large-spiked leaves, if left unchecked these plants can develop into dense thickets that create large ungrazable areas, while also preventing the regeneration of native vegetation.

A comprehensive control programme is completed annually, and figures from operations over the past three years show a steady reduction in plant numbers from 206 in the 2018/19 season, 105 in 2019/20, and down to 29 plants in 2020/21.

The team will continue undertaking this work to ensure the population of white-edged nightshade on Banks Peninsula keeps reducing.

Please contact us if you believe you have seen this plant by email at biosecurity@ecan.govt.nz or by contacting Environment Canterbury customer services on 0800 324 636.



Biosecurity Advisory Groups update

Four Biosecurity Advisory Groups are working with Environment Canterbury to provide advice on biosecurity programmes and champion pest management initiatives.

The four Biosecurity Advisory Groups - North Canterbury, Central (Selwyn & Ashburton), Christchurch/Banks Peninsula and South Canterbury - have an important role to play in our region. As well as being a sounding board for issues arising within the community, these groups provide direct advice on the council's biosecurity programme.

In the past 12 months the groups have provided advice on the future management of specific pests like nassella tussock, gorse and broom, as well as sharing their thoughts on how council can effectively communicate the process and criteria for declaring new organisms as pests in the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan.

Environment Canterbury's future biosecurity focus is on increasing surveillance and investigation programmes to detect and manage new or emerging organisms and pests. Part of this focus involves managing pest pathways into and around the Canterbury region. Recently, the advisory groups have assisted with creating a better understanding of the barriers the community faces engaging in pest pathway management practices.

Biosecurity Advisory Group meetings are held quarterly and are open to the public with time set aside for public input. However, some meetings involve field visits that may not be suitable for public attendance. You can see a list of group members and view upcoming meeting dates for your area at ecan.govt.nz/biosecuritychampion or by contacting Environment Canterbury customer services on 0800 324 636.

Time to control your brushweeds

With spring just around the corner, now is a good time to be planning your spring brushweed control work. Remember to book your contractor early and contact your chemical representative if you need advice on matters like application rates or what chemicals to use.

If you are controlling brushweeds, please remember to contact your local council regarding their district plan rules around native vegetation clearance.



Photo insert 1: White-edged nightshade.

Photo insert 2: Gorse.



Seen a wallaby? Say so!

Wallabies were introduced to New Zealand from Australia in the 1870s and are an unwanted pest that are causing serious damage to our environment.

Wallabies prevent the regeneration of native bush and deplete forest undergrowth, and also impact farming by competing with livestock for food and limiting the livestock carrying capacity on farms. They can also foul sheep feed, damage fences, and destroy agricultural crops and plantation forestry.

Environment Canterbury is working with the National Wallaby Eradication Programme and landowners to progressively reduce the range of wallabies in our region, and we need your help. If you see a wallaby outside the containment zone please report it - your help locating them is vital to control efforts.

Report wallabies by using www.reportwallabies.nz or by calling 0800 EC INFO (0800 324 636).

Introducing Paige Lawson

We are thrilled to welcome Paige Lawson to the biosecurity team at Environment Canterbury.

Paige will be fulfilling the new role of Biosecurity Officer – Community Engagement, which will allow our biosecurity programme to reach communities more effectively across the region. Paige previously worked as an Advisory Officer in Environment Canterbury's customer services team and has a strong working knowledge of the organisation. In her new role, Paige will engage with the community about biosecurity information and activities, and will look for opportunities to work collaboratively across the region.

She will also be an advocate for pest management and help deliver our future-focused approach that is aimed at early intervention.

Paige graduated from Lincoln University where she studied biosecurity and ecology, followed by animal management specialising in zookeeping. She is passionate about the outdoors and has worked in regional parks and zoos in both Christchurch and London, as well as teaching outdoor education and science in the United Arab Emirates.

Keep an eye out for Paige at shows and events throughout Canterbury. We look forward to helping her get underway in this important new role for our biosecurity team.



Photo insert 1: Signage encouraging the public to report wallaby sightings.

Photo insert 2: Paige Lawson.

For all pest enquiries, please contact the biosecurity team via 0800 324 636 or email biosecurity@ecan.govt.nz

