

Phragmites:



The last issue of this newsletter (July 2008) featured the invasive pest plant Phragmites. *Phragmites australis*, an 'unwanted organism', is one of eleven such species listed on MAF Biosecurity New Zealand's (MAFBNZ) National Interest Pests Response. Go to www.biosecurity.govt.nz and search for NIPR.

The MAFBNZ-led National Interest Pest Responses (NIPR) aim is to eradicate certain established pests from New Zealand. The pests included on the NIPR have been selected because of their potential to have a significant impact on our economic, environmental, social or cultural values.

Environment Canterbury is working with MAFBNZ to eradicate Phragmites from the Canterbury region. Only two sites for *P. australis* are currently known in the Ashburton district. Fortunately, the conditions at those sites have not been suitable for it to spread further. A spraying regime to eradicate this pest plant has occurred at both sites with good control results to date.

For more information on Phragmites visit www.biosecurity.govt.nz/pests/phragmites

If you think you suspect you have found Phragmites please contact Environment Canterbury's Potential Pest Line on (03) 363 9380 or email weeds@ecan.govt.nz and attach a photo if you wish. Confirmed sightings will be reported to MAFBNZ.

Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy 2005-2015: 5 year Review

The Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy 2005-2015 became operative on 1 July 2005. Environment Canterbury must review the RPMS half way through its operative 10-year period, by 30 June 2010. The five year review is to check on whether the RPMS is effective and to highlight areas where more work or a change of focus is needed before a full review of the strategy in 2015.

The time for making initial written suggestions (by August 7) has passed, but further suggestions may still be considered. There will also be an opportunity for you to give your views at one of the local meetings to be scheduled from October this year. Watch newspapers and the Environment Canterbury website for dates and news on the review process.

For detailed information, call Ray Maw on 03 371 7187 or email him at ray.maw@ecan.govt.nz.

A discussion paper on the review can be downloaded at www.ecan.govt.nz/Plans+and+Reports/pestAndWeeds or call Customer Services on 03 353 9007 for a hard copy.

Welcome to the 2009 edition of Ashburton Pest News

Ashburton Pest Liaison Committee Chairman, Robin Grigg



It is good to see so much Ashburton specific information in it, rather than wider Canterbury stuff. Even Ashburton District's unofficial state flower, the nodding thistle is mentioned. It must be of concern to the seeds industry to see the nodder spreading across the plains. As a district we need to protect our important small seeds industry from contamination.

The Environment Canterbury Pest Management Strategy is up for a review of how it is working. Unfortunately it'll be a tough ask to add new pests not already in the strategy.

Wild pigs were nearly included in the plan. There has been a massive increase in pigs in the higher foothills and high country in the last few years. Much of the infestation is on Department of Conservation country, but is beginning to spread onto farmed country. It is amazing how much ground a couple of pigs can rip up in a few days. Then there is the habit of pigs scoffing up lambs as they are born, which is both unfortunate for the lamb and for the farmer whose lambing percentage can drop dramatically. Environment Canterbury pest strategies cannot bind DOC, which is annoying in this sort of case, but pigs definitely need to be considered for control outside the DOC estate. Pigs were thick in the foothills in the 1890s but were eradicated. They now seem to be spreading again, often out of the back of vehicles.

Wearing another hat, I should comment on the review of the Animal Health Board's Tb strategy. Do we push hard for elimination of Tb, at a short-term cost, or coast along with containment and work on it for ever? Beef farmers of a certain age will remember the testing and vaccination programmes that cleared New Zealand of bovine brucellosis. They will also remember how Tb took off again after effort was reduced in the 1980s when the disease seemed beaten. Do we go all out like the Aussies did and clear Tb up once and for all? If we can beat the Aussies at rugby, surely we can at least match them in Tb management!

Protect your investment!

With harder economic times and financial pressure on rural businesses it is easy for pest control to take a back seat. Unfortunately, pests still multiply during tough times and if control is not kept up, progress made during previous years can be quickly lost. Prevention and maintenance is better than the cure and your good work won't be in vain, as long as you keep it up!



Environment Canterbury
Your regional council

Old Man's Beard savaged on the Ashburton River



For those of you that walk along the Ashburton River, you will have seen first hand the invasive and smothering effects of Old Man's Beard (OMB). This vine, once a popular garden plant, has been present along this river system for many years. It

is now so well established the sheer volume of plant matter growing in trees along our river threatens to collapse and kill the hosts it climbs. Dying and dead trees can block rivers, causing flooding. Old Man's Beard is likely to have become established through the illegal dumping of garden clippings and wind-spread seed from private gardens.

Environment Canterbury River Engineering staff go above and beyond the legal requirements for controlling OMB as part of their river protection program.

(Visit www.ecan.govt.nz and click on *Pests Plants and Animals*, under *Our Environment* for more information)

Since January, river engineering staff have cleared 3.8 km of riverbed of OMB.

This year's work has been carried out at four locations.

- 1) Tinwald side: upstream from Boundary Road on the rivers main stem.
- 2) Tinwald side: above SH1 Bridge.
- 3) North branch of the Ashburton River: below Shearer's crossing.
- 4) North branch of the Ashburton River: downstream of Seven Bends.

Local farmers have been assisting in maintaining control of OMB by grazing cleared sites currently in grass.

As part of their OMB control programme Environment Canterbury's River Engineering team has also been in consultation with the Ashburton District Council about the Ashburton River walkway. A public meeting was held to brainstorm ways of improving and maintaining the existing walkway that is suffering from lack of maintenance.

If you would like to be involved, please contact David Askin on 027 531 3678.

Maintaining a successful Gorse and Broom control programme

- Clear boundaries of gorse and broom at least 10 m back (where neighbouring boundaries are clear or being cleared of gorse and broom).
- Trim boundary hedges, top back and sides after flowering but before seed set annually.
- Focus on clearing scattered plants and small patches. These are the biggest threat to clean areas on properties. It is more cost effective than spraying block infestations (areas greater than 50sqm) or trying to reclaim heavily infested areas.
- Plan and work methodically across the property, beginning with the least infested areas and working back towards block infestations.
- Control plants before seed set to prevent more seed adding to the seed bank.

If you would like assistance in developing a Gorse and Broom weed control programme for your property or would like to discuss your current control programme feel free to contact a local Biosecurity officer for advice.

Nodding thistle, a prickly problem

This purple-flowered pest poses a serious threat to agricultural production and appears to have become more prevalent in some areas of Ashburton.

Nodding thistle is a difficult weed to deal with, for a number of reasons. It grows in dense patches, is not readily grazed due to its spiny foliage, and discourages animals from grazing surrounding pasture, causing reduction in stock carrying capacity. As if that's not bad enough, the spiny heads of mature plants can contaminate wool, decreasing its value.

Dense patches of "noddors" can also provide cover for pest animals, particularly rabbits. The presence of nodding thistle seed can also devalue certified seed production for cropping operations.

Seed spread is the only means of dispersal. Although the fluffy white seed parachutes can be seen floating in the air well away from patches of thistle, most seeds have already fallen close to the parent plant as they are heavy. Other methods of seed dispersal include hitching a ride on flowing water, animals, amongst hay, in agricultural equipment and contaminated agricultural seed. Seeds have longevity of 10 years and will mature even after plants are cut.

Land occupiers are required to clear nodding thistle 40 m back from boundaries (including roadsides), stockwater and irrigation races prior seed set. These rules are in place to prevent nodding thistle from infesting adjacent land currently clear of the pest.

Pay us an e-visit

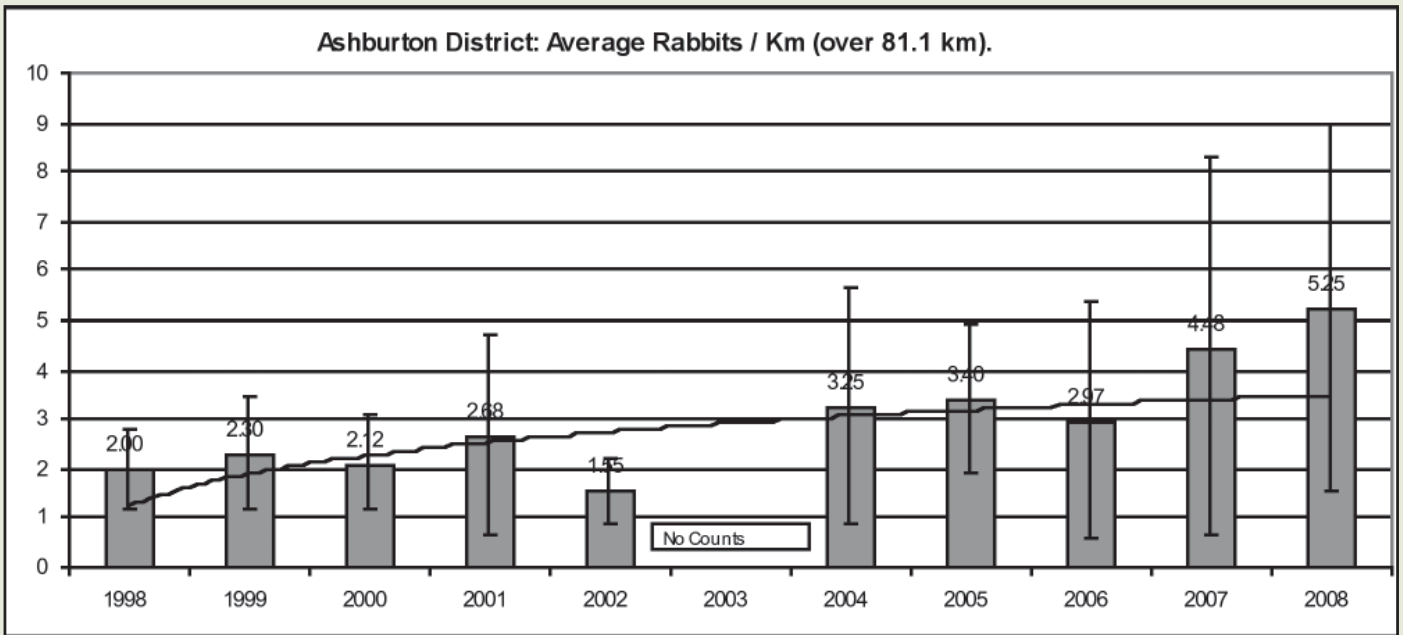
Copies of all pest newsletters are available at www.ecan.govt.nz.

www.ecan.govt.nz

Ashburton annual mean Rabbit numbers 1998-2008

The Ashburton Pest District has a small number of transects, four in the foothill high country and one on the coast. Four of the five transects show increases in rabbit numbers, the district average rising by 0.77 rabbits/km in 2007 to 5.25 rabbits/ km in 2008.

The inspection process throughout the Ashburton plains where there are no transects indicates low rabbit levels. Landowner initiated control, changes in land use and RHD epidemics are combining effectively to curb any population increase at this stage.

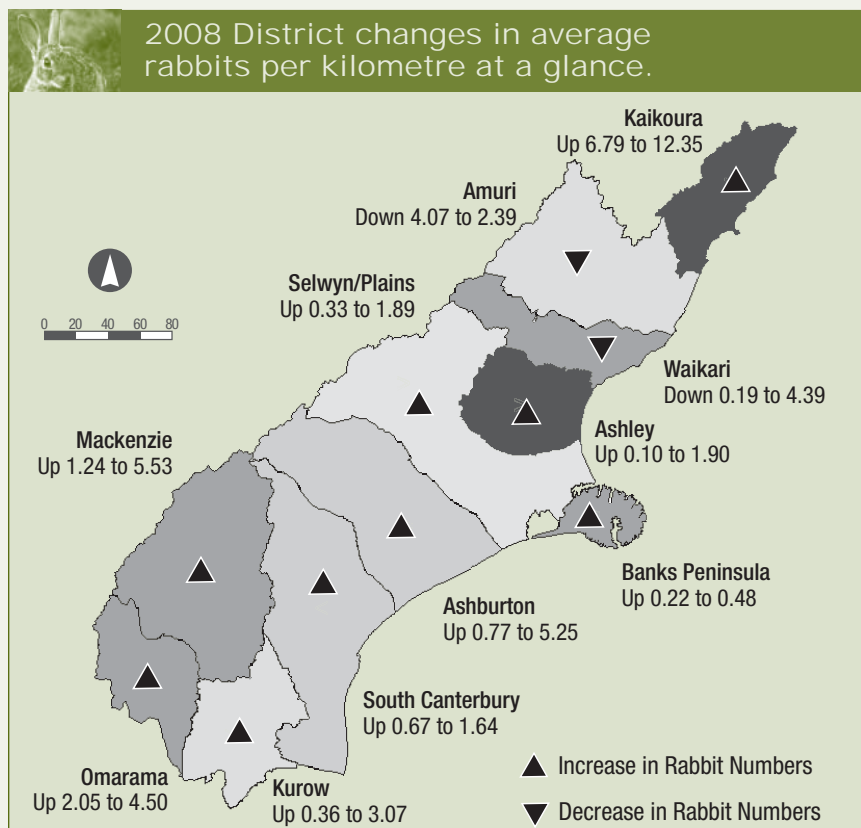


95% confidence interval error bars are shown in black. These bars show a range around the mean. This can be wide where transects within a pest district cover land variable in its cover, topography & susceptibility to rabbits.

Ashburton Rabbit numbers

Spring 2008 rabbit monitoring results indicate that nine of the region's eleven pest districts have shown rabbit increases over 2007 figures.

South Canterbury, Selwyn/Plains, Banks Peninsula and most of Ashburton and Ashley pest districts continue to have rabbit populations that are generally considered stable. Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) epidemics, rainfall, disease, predation and some secondary control within the districts appears to be containing numbers effectively at present.



1080 – Vital for animal pest control

Pest and Biosecurity portfolio chair & Selwyn/Banks Peninsula Councillor, Eugenie Sage



The use of poisoned bait, particularly 1080 for the control of animal pests, has always attracted controversy and that's a good thing. It keeps us honest. It helps us focus on what we are trying to achieve in pest control and knowing we are accountable, makes sure we only use the best methods available.

The challenge in Canterbury is to find an efficient and cost effective way of reducing rabbits and possums over some challenging and extensive terrain. In some cases, poisons are the only viable way of saving pasture and the soils it depends on and protecting our unique indigenous biodiversity.

Where the use of 1080 is absolutely necessary, it is always with permission and usually at the request of the land owner/ occupier. Environment Canterbury's Biosecurity team makes sure it complies with the Resource Management Act and the best practice standards set by the Environmental Risk Management Agency (ERMA). That's a lot of eyes and ears making sure things are done the right way!

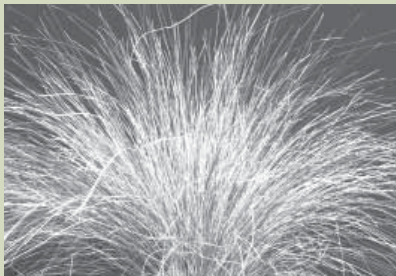
At the request of the pest committee chairs and as part of an integrated approach to animal pest management, Environment Canterbury is applying for a region wide resource consent for 1080 use on private land. This would be mainly to control rabbits, wallabies and possums through the targeted spread of carrot bait and cereal pellets. It would save private landholders from having to apply for individual resource consents provided they meet standard conditions.

Rabbit numbers in particular are increasing as RHD (rabbit haemorrhagic disease) becomes less effective and alternative control measures now need to be stepped up.

In finalising Environment Canterbury's 10 year plan in June councillors responded to public and ratepayer submissions by re-instating the regional funding share of the bovine Tb programme at approximately 10% of the programme's cost in Canterbury. Many of the 72 submissions said that reducing funding to control possums, ferrets and other Tb vectors would undermine the gains made in recent years.

Nassella

Nassella tussock, a long-lived perennial grass, is dotted around various sites throughout the Ashburton region. It is an aggressive coloniser which can



become the dominate species in a pasture. It produces masses of seeds which are extremely easily dispersed. Nassella is an issue for the farming industry as it is unpalatable to stock and out-competes edible species, reducing stocking rates. Open land which is dry, sunny such as heavily grazed pasture can be highly susceptible to infestation.

Ashburton high country landowners in the Rakaia gorge have, over the years, established and maintained a control programme for Nassella. Their combined efforts in dealing to the Nassella issue has resulted in numbers decreasing considerably since the

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

Graham Sullivan is the Biosecurity Manager responsible for implementing the regional pest management strategy, phone 03 687 7835. The biosecurity section is organised into three teams:

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in Amberley
Phone 03 314 8014.

The Southern Area Team
Leader in Timaru is
Brent Glentworth
Phone 03 687 7834.

The Central Area Team
Leader is Rob McCaw
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Phone 03 372 7262.

Bovine Tb Management
is through TB Free
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1970s. Ongoing commitment to Nassella control on a yearly basis, prior to seed set, is the key to maintaining plant numbers at low levels in this type of terrain.

Nassella may still be found on some properties on the Ashburton plains. However, those plants found recently have only been small and not likely to have seeded.

Searching vulnerable areas for Nassella is an important part of ensuring it is not spreading unnoticed throughout the region. Three new patches of mature Nassella were found last year in the Rakaia River system by a routine search. All patches were controlled and there will now be follow-up control measures annually.

If you think you may have Nassella on your property or have seen it elsewhere, please contact your local Biosecurity officer.