



# Saved from the savage ants

## Pest strategy update

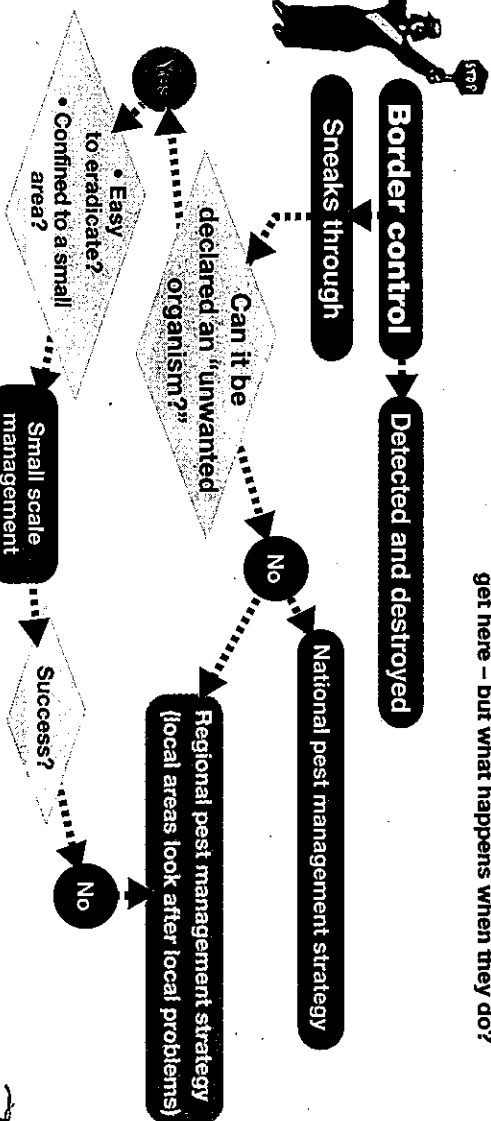
Environment Canterbury fronted up to a pest problem this month. Fifty-nine submitters were scheduled to speak to a panel of councillors, who are listening to people's views on a proposed regional pest management strategy.

The proposed strategy deals with 16 biodiversity pests including possums, ferrets, stoats, wasps and honeyeater. The panel (called a board of inquiry under the Biosecurity Act) is scheduled to report recommendations back to Environment Canterbury's October 14 council meeting.

The biodiversity pests strategy is the second such document prepared by ECan. The current pest management strategy (due to be reviewed next year) deals with economic pests including goats, rabbits and nassella tussock.

## Processing pests

New Zealand is a geographically isolated island nation. That makes it harder for pests to get here – but what happens when they do?



An eagle-eyed Christchurch resident may have saved the city from the world's worst ant pest. Environment Canterbury is praising the actions of the person who spotted an unusual infestation in a potted plant purchased in Auckland.

The plant housed a hitchhiking colony of Argentine ants, a major domestic pest in many parts of the world.

An Environment Canterbury-funded survey indicates the original colony has not spread. The survey was carried out in late summer using 60 sugar-baited traps. The traps caught more than 1200 ants, but none was of the Argentine variety.

Ray Maw, Environment Canterbury senior resource management planner, says without the quick action and co-operation of Christchurch residents, the city could have been dealing with a major new insect pest.

"It's impossible to be 100 per cent sure the ant is not already here, but on this occasion at least, it has not had the opportunity to spread."

The original colony is destined for total eradication this spring, when the weather is warmer and the ants more active.

The Argentine ant has invaded sites across Africa, Europe, North America, Australia and the North Island. It is an aggressive insect, which takes over from other ants, including native species.

In houses, Argentine ants swarm over food and enter fridges and unopened packets. They've even been known to spiral down the inside of screw-top jars – especially if the contents are sweet.

Horticultural headaches arise because the ant will "farm" honey/dew-producing insects such as leafhoppers and aphids, protecting them from predators.

First discovered in New Zealand in 1990 at the Auckland Commonwealth Games site, it's been suggested the South Islands' cooler, drier conditions may have acted as a natural barrier to the insect pest.

Environment Canterbury is in contact with other regional councils and conservation groups who are concerned about the potential spread of the Argentine ant which is being investigated as the possible target of a national pest management strategy co-ordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Ant illustration reproduced courtesy of Kristine Ha.