

When good plants go BAD



They looked pretty and they smelled nice, but that was all part of the plan for a group of plants that are now on a national hit list.

National surveillance plant pests are plants that have serious effects on agricultural production, human health and enjoyment or natural ecosystems.

They spread easily and quickly and once established, are difficult to control.

Some were introduced accidentally and others were imported for their scent, colour and beauty. They've since escaped from gardens and become environment or agricultural problems.

There are 110 plants on the national surveillance list. The list was developed by botanists, scientists, conservation and farming interests and local government. It's a national effort to stop the further spread of plant pests by humans.

How does it work?
New Zealand's noxious plants act was replaced in 1993 by the biosecurity act. The biosecurity act allows regional councils to develop regional pest management strategies. As part of these strategies, regional councils have agreed to prohibit the propagation, sale and distribution of all 110 plants on the national surveillance list.

Environment Canterbury's biosecurity section can provide you with a list of national surveillance plant pests, (phone 03 365 3828), or you can view the council's full pest management strategy under the plans and reports section of our website: www.ecan.govt.nz

Disease decimates

The killer rabbit disease continues to decimate pest populations in the Mackenzie Basin. Spotlight counts show rabbit levels remain low, a result of the release of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in August 1997. Elsewhere in the region, results are variable. Conventional poisoning or shooting operations will be required this year in those parts of North Canterbury where a high percentage of rabbits (between 50 and 90 per cent) are believed to be immune to the disease. Environment Canterbury is working with Landcare Research, investigating the cause and effect of RHD immunity.

- The first rabbits were imported to New Zealand from New South Wales, pre-1838.
- In 1893, 16 million rabbit skins were exported from New Zealand.
- In 1888, Government advertised for 30,000 ferrets . . . to help kill the rabbits.
- Female rabbits can become pregnant within 12 hours of giving birth.
- Eight rabbits eat as much pasture as one sheep.



That means it's an offence to help spread anything on the list –

swapping garden cuttings, collecting seeds or buying from reputable dealers could be aiding and abetting the spread of a major problem.

Rob McCaw, Environment Canterbury biosecurity team leader, says some of the plants are commonplace in Canterbury – things like Mexican or seaside daisy, Japanese honeysuckle, coltsfoot, aluminium or artillery plant and Pampas grass.

"While it's not illegal to have them in the garden, what we're asking people to do is help stop their spread."

Some of the plants on the list, like gorse and various types of thistle, are also subject to special control programmes, as defined in regional pest management strategies. In these cases, landowners have obligations to actively control them on their land.

You can help . . . by ensuring that you don't give any of these national surveillance plants to your friends. If you decide that you no longer want them in your garden, then please dispose of them responsibly. If you're aware of any being sold, we'd like to hear about it.

How we get rid of them

Environment Canterbury takes a four-step approach to the destruction of plant pests.

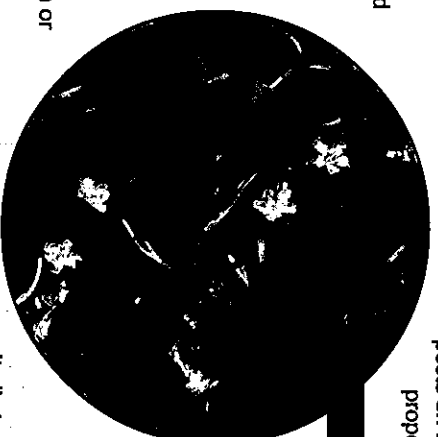
In 1998, it released a pest management strategy which recognised that different types of pests needed different control regimes, depending on how widespread they were and what problems they were causing.

Under the strategy, some pests became the responsibility of individual landholders. They were listed as progressive or containment control plants. Total control plants are managed with money collected from all Cantabrians. The cost of monitoring and inspecting the spread of plant pests is shared proportionately between general ratepayers and individual landholders who have pests on their properties.

Total control means complete eradication is possible: African love grass, baccharis, bur daisy, coltsfoot, entire marshwort, saf- from thistle, taurian thistle and white edged nightshade.

Progressive control means systematic progress can be made towards complete eradication: african feather grass and nassella tussock.

Containment control means infestations will be cleared (especially from property boundaries or where the plant is still a small-scale problem) to stop the further spread of the pest: broom, gorse, nodding thistle, old man's beard and ragwort. Surveillance plant pests are those that are prohibited from sale, propagation or distribution. There 110 plants on a national surveillance list. Some of those are also recognised in the other categories of Environment Canterbury's pest management strategy.



Aquatic beauty smothers waterways

It all started with a single, pretty yellow pond plant. Four years later, the aquatic beauty had smothered 400 square metres of water. Weed matting and an excavator were required in the removal operation and at the end of the day, 50 tonnes of entire marshwort (pictured) were carted away from the pond on the outskirts of Christchurch.

The discovery of entire marshwort in Canterbury last summer was a stern reminder of the need to be vigilant about plant pests. While the plant is on the national surveillance list and is listed in a special category of the region's pest management strategy, it had not been seen in Canterbury for two years.

Quick community response following publicity about the Christchurch site resulted in the destruction of one more infestation, investigations at a number of suspected sites, and the discovery of yet another invasive national surveillance pest, alligator weed. It was previously thought that the South Island was not warm enough for alligator weed to survive.

"The community is our best ally in the fight against the spread of these problem plants," says Rob McCaw, Environment Canterbury biosecurity team leader.

Aquatic plants make up 20 per cent of the national surveillance list. Environment Canterbury has recently released a brochure highlighting the region's water weed problems. Contact customer services on 03 365 3828 or 0800 EC INFO (0900 32 4636).

Catching the waves

Southerly swells generate two-thirds of the waves that crash onto Canterbury's shores. Some of the biggest have topped nine metres, although most are between one and two metres high.

The information comes from Environment Canterbury's wave recorder, moored in 90 metres of water, 17 kilometres east of Le Bons Bay on Banks Peninsula. The recorder uses electronic sensors to measure wave height and direction. Results are automatically transmitted to Environment Canterbury's web site.

According to latest data, the average height of waves off the Canterbury coast is 1.89 metres. Only one per cent top four metres, but all of them come from the southerly quarter. Environment Canterbury has responsibility under the Resource Management Act to undertake long term monitoring of environmental conditions on the Canterbury coast. This includes an understanding of the wave climate (a record of all the different sizes and directions of waves over a long period of time) and the effects of waves on coastal hazards and shoreline stability.

The recorder, jointly funded by NIWA and the Christchurch City Council, has had a checked history since it was installed 16 months ago. Out of action for some months following a collision with a boat, it was also knocked off-line for a week in October by the storms that battered Christchurch.

Wave spotting at Environment Canterbury's website: www.ecan.govt.nz. Follow the directions from the river and rainfall pages.