

Protecting our forest resource

Don Hammond

Forests are found throughout New Zealand - from our extensive natural forests extending from sea level to the timberline, the plantations that support our significant forest industry, to the urban forests that grace our towns and cities.

The security of these forests from the very substantial threat posed by introduced pests and diseases has been a topic constantly in the press in recent times, due to a number of incursions and our response to them. In addition some high profile problems offshore (such as mad cow and foot and mouth diseases, and the recent anthrax scares) have highlighted the need for constant vigilance, improved interception capability and a willingness and capability to respond when a new organism breaches our borders.

Responsibility for protecting our assets lies with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) but in reality it is a responsibility that everyone must share. In particular, as professionals involved in the management of forests wherever they occur, we need to be constantly vigilant against the threat posed by pests and diseases.

Earlier this year MAF Forest Biosecurity recognised the need for consultative committees to advise the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) within MAF, and for the CTO to advise the Committee on biosecurity issues. Two consultative committees have been formed; one concentrating on export issues and one with a more generic focus on forest biosecurity.

The committee consists of a number of "Core" members of which the NZIF is one, along with a

number of "Non-Core" members who have an interest in the issues.

The NZIF is recognised as a Core member due to our representation of all forestry professionals and our responsibility for ensuring management of forests is seen in much wider terms than simply the commercial outputs from plantations. As such, the NZIF focus will be to assist MAF in ensuring all forests are given the highest level of protection that the available resources can provide.

There are currently a number of recently arrived forest pests in New Zealand for which various control measures is being undertaken. The following section provides an update on the status of these pests and the control activities.

Painted Apple Moth

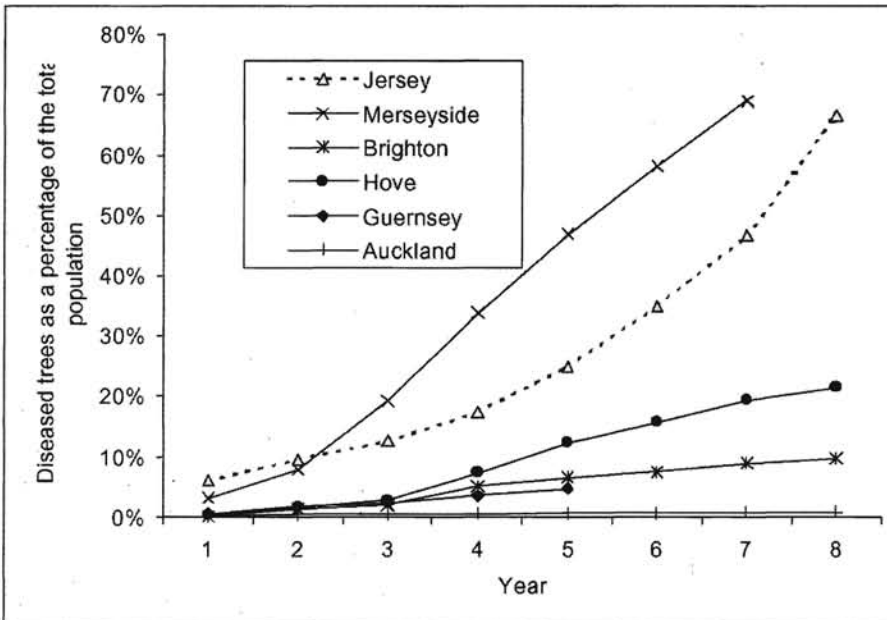
This is currently the highest profile new forest pest. Cabinet recently approved the targeted aerial spraying of parts of Auckland to control this moth. The chemical to be used is the same as used for the control of White Spotted Tussock moth in Auckland a few years ago. The tussock moth programme appears to have been completely successful in eradicating the species.

Cabinet's approval was for very targeted spraying against Painted Apple Moth (PAM) rather than the blanket spray programme used on tussock moth. The approval was only given for areas that were difficult or impossible to control by means of spraying from the ground such as the riparian areas along the Whau River. Cabinet's view was that blanket spraying over residential areas was not acceptable.

While there can be little doubt that the likelihood of success is greater with blanket spraying, the majority of the scientific experts believe that the ongoing ground control, combined with the aerial operation has a moderate to high chance of successfully eradicating PAM. Spraying is programmed to start in December but it will be several months before there is any indication of its success. In the meantime, ground surveys and control work will continue.

PAM has been present in Auckland for over two years now but as the female does not fly its natural rate of spread is

Dutch Elm Disease Trends



slow, unless it receives human assistance. The risk of human assistance (either deliberate or more likely inadvertent) is always present, so the sooner control and eradication is achieved the better.

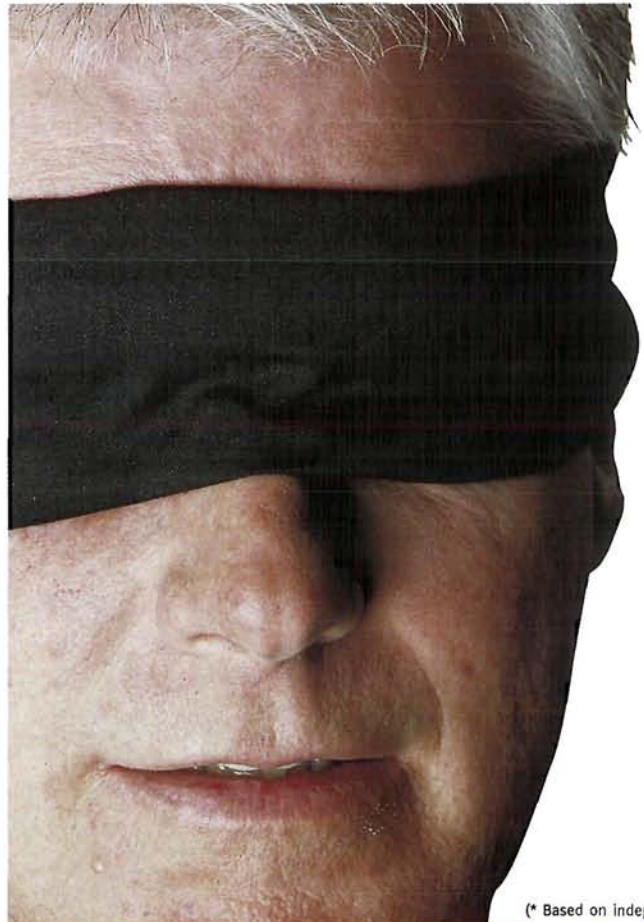
Dutch Elm Disease

This very significant pest was first found in Auckland in 1989. Since then there has been ongoing work to eradicate it. The trees in Auckland were resurveyed in 2000/01 and eight infected trees were found, one of which was new. These were the first infected trees found since 1995/96. Survey work is continuing in the current year, and in addition an independent review of the response and outcomes is to be carried out.

While we cannot say the pest is eradicated, the



The painted apple moth caterpillar with distinctive hairy back.



work done over the past decade has produced an excellent result for New Zealand when the magnitude of the threat is understood as shown in the graph. There is an ongoing commitment to eradicating this pest of our urban forests. As a footnote, a second outbreak of the pest in Napier appears to have been successfully eradicated.

Uraba Gum Leaf Skeletoniser

This small pest was first found on *Eucalyptus* trees at Mt Maunganui. A recent survey of the area has found neither life stages of the insect nor any feeding damage. The last finds were in 2000 and there is now hope that the pest has been eliminated.

The next survey is due in January 2002 and work is continuing on the development of a pheromone for use in trapping.

A second outbreak of the pest was recently found in Auckland in conjunction with the PAM surveys. At this stage it appears that the outbreak was restricted to four trees and is now under control.

Several other insect finds have also been reported that affect a number of species. Work is continuing on the control of these. While the number of pests entering the country is a cause for concern it is pleasing from a forester's viewpoint is that there is a commitment to eradication of many of them to ensure the ongoing integrity of all our forest and tree assets.

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