

**Knepp
Ragwort Monitoring 2009**



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Ragwort Monitoring 2009

Introduction

Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* is toxic to livestock and its proliferation in formerly arable fields in Knepp has caused concern among some neighbours and adjacent landowners. A Ragwort Strategy for Knepp has been produced¹, in compliance with which a strip of a minimum of 50m metres around the New Barn / Brookhouse boundary will be topped annually in July. In addition, ragwort will be monitored annually in 16 fields across the New Barn / Brookhouse area. This part of the Estate has been selected as much of it is arable reversion and it also is bordered by those who have expressed concern about the ragwort. The New Barn / Brookhouse area was fenced in spring 2009, and at the time of this first ragwort survey, 75 head of cattle had been present since the end of May.

Methodology.

16 fields were surveyed for ragwort with abundance assessed visually and ranked using the DAFOR (Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare) scale (Table 1). The fields were selected more or less randomly, although examples from each vegetation type (except woodland and wetland) as recorded in 2005 (Greenaway 2006) were selected. Each field was photographed to provide a visual record. The survey was conducted in early August, at a time when ragwort is in full flower and so clearly visible. Patrick Toe carried out the fieldwork and photography. Photographs of each field are given in the Appendix.

Results.

Table 1. Ragwort abundance, 2009.

Ragwort monitoring		
Recorder: Patrick Toe		
Field	Abundance (DAFOR)	FEP classification & code
Wild Flower Meadow A	A	Semi-improved grassland GO2
Lashmere	A	Arable AO1
New Barn 4	A	Arable reversion AR
Brookhouse 13	A	Arable reversion AR
Barn Field	A	Improved grassland GO1
Smokehouse 2	F	Arable reversion/semi-improved grassland AR/GR2
Hampshires 1	F	Arable reversion AR
Brookhouse 9	F	Arable reversion AR
Bentons Lane 1	F	Arable reversion AR
New Barn 5	F	Arable reversion AR
Honeypools Barn	F	Arable reversion AR
Oaklands 2	O	Semi-improved grassland GO2
Broomers	O	Arable reversion AR
Fresco West	O	Arable AO1
Waterworks West	O	Improved grassland GO1
Waterworks East	O	Improved grassland GO1

¹ www.knepp.co.uk/wildlandproject/injuriousweedpolicy

Discussion.

There is no apparent trend in ragwort abundance either in field position or land use as classified in 2005. Although longhorn cattle had been allowed onto this newly fenced site, their presence is not thought to have been of long enough duration to affect the vegetation to any great extent. It will therefore be extremely instructive to repeat this survey annually in order to identify any changes in ragwort distribution or abundance.

The methodology is cost-effective, taking one person less than one day overall to carry out the fieldwork and approximately half a day for the report. It is unlikely that ragwort will ever be eradicated from Knepp, or indeed the wider countryside, and as a native wild plant, such an outcome is undesirable. It is hoped that the flush of ragwort seen in some fields and recorded as 'Abundant' will however diminish as the vegetation structure and soils change to a more natural dynamic following arable reversion.

Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* is also a common plant on the damper grassland of Knepp and this too has conspicuous yellow flowers in July and August. Patches can be seen in some of the photographs, notably those of Bentons and Water Works West. It is possible that from a distance, people concerned about ragwort may be mistaking fleabane for the toxic ragwort.

References

Greenaway, T.E. (2006) *Knepp Castle Estate: baseline ecological survey*. English Nature Research Report Number 693.

Appendix.

Photographic Record of ragwort.



Barnfield



Bentons Lane 1



Brookhouse 13



Brookhouse 9



Broomers



Fresco West



Hampshires 1



Honeypools Barn



Lashmere



New Barn 4



New Barn 5



Oaklands 2



Smokehouse 2



Waterworks East



Waterworks West



Wildflower Meadow