

Knepp Ragwort Monitoring 2011



**Patrick Toe & Theresa Greenaway
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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 was produced in 2009¹, in compliance with which a strip of a minimum of 50m metres around the southern block 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 southern block was fenced in spring 2009.

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 July, 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, 2010 and 2011

Recorder: Patrick Toe	2009	2010	2011	
Field	Abundance (DAFOR)			FEP classification & code at 2005
Wild Flower Meadow A	A	R	A	Semi-improved grassland GO2
Lashmere	A	O	A	Arable AO1
New Barn 4	A	F	O	Arable reversion AR
Brookhouse 13	A	F	A	Arable reversion AR
Barn Field	A	F	A	Improved grassland GO1
Smokehouse 2	F	F	F	Arable reversion/semi-imp grassland AR/GR2
Hampshires 1	F	O	A	Arable reversion AR
Brookhouse 9	F	O	O	Arable reversion AR
Bentons Lane 1	F	O	F	Arable reversion AR
New Barn 5	F	F	F	Arable reversion AR
Honeypools Barn	F	O	A	Arable reversion AR
Oaklands 2	O	O	O	Semi-improved grassland GO2
Broomers	O	O	O	Arable reversion AR
Fresco West	O	F	A	Arable AO1
Waterworks West	O	O	F	Improved grassland GO1
Waterworks East	O	R	F	Improved grassland GO1

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

Discussion.

After the optimism caused by the considerable decline in ragwort abundance in 2010, the resurgence seen in 2011 is disappointing. Seven out of the sixteen fields scored A (Abundant) following five scoring A in 2009 and none in 2010. It is understood that 2011 was a 'good' year for ragwort, at least in southern England, indicating that climatic and other variables have influenced the amount of ragwort on Knepp rather than land use alone. 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 would be undesirable. However, it is to be hoped that high-abundance years prove to be in the minority.

Reference

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

Appendix



Barn Field



Bentons Lane 1



Brookhouse 9



Brookhouse 13



Broomers Corner



Fresco West



Hampshires 1



Honeypools Barn



Lashmere



New Barn 4



New Barn 5



Oaklands 2



Smokehouse 2



Waterworks East



Waterworks West



Wild Flower Meadow