

Ragwort Monitoring 2012

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, 2009-2012

Recorder: Patrick Toe	2009	2010	2011	2012
Field	Abundance (DAFOR)			
Wild Flower Meadow A	A	R	A	O
Lashmere	A	O	A	O
New Barn 4	A	F	O	O
Brookhouse 13	A	F	A	F
Barn Field	A	F	A	A
Smokehouse 2	F	F	F	O
Hampshires 1	F	O	A	R
Brookhouse 9	F	O	O	O/R
Bentons Lane 1	F	O	F	O
New Barn 5	F	F	F	F
Honeypools Barn	F	O	A	O
Oaklands 2	O	O	O	O
Broomers	O	O	O	O
Fresco West	O	F	A	F
Waterworks West	O	O	F	A
Waterworks East	O	R	F	O

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

Discussion.

Ragwort abundance over the past four years has fluctuated fairly dramatically. 2011 saw a resurgence in ragwort following a year of decline; 2012 has seen another decline almost down to the 2010 level of across most fields. Only two fields rated an 'A' rating, in comparison with seven in 2011. This is cause for optimism, and it seems that high levels one year do not necessarily mean that there will be even higher levels in the following year. Of the 16 fields monitored, Barn Field has shown the highest levels of ragwort overall, and perhaps could be the subject of additional control measures. Oaklands 2 and Broomers have consistently rated 'O', which does (tentatively) indicate some stability. Ragwort control will continue on an annual basis.

Reference

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