

# *Pest of the month*

## **Controlling pest plants the natural way**

A natural way to control pest plants or animals is to introduce another plant or animal which will inhibit the spread. This is called biological control (biocontrol).

The aim of biocontrol of pest plants is to restore the balance between pest plants and the environment. Biocontrol methods are best used when the desired outcome is not eradication, or when other control measures may cause unacceptable damage. Biocontrol is also good when alternative methods are not economically or physically possible.

Biocontrol has many advantages over other pest control measures. It is sustainable, has low ongoing costs, poses no human health concerns, and pests are controlled regardless of land ownership. Although there is a substantial cost in identifying, sourcing and testing suitable and acceptable agents (an organism that will attack the plant, like a fungus or insect) from overseas, the ongoing control of some pest plants by biocontrol agents can be justified

The Tasman-Nelson region has experienced substantial benefits from the control of ragwort in the last decade from the release of two biocontrol agents, the cinnabar moth and the ragwort flea beetle. A new agent (Ragwort Plume Moth), better suited to wetter parts of the region, is to be released later this year.



**Cinnabar Moth** - The colourful red and brown cinnabar moth is now well established throughout the region where ragwort occurs and its large yellow and black caterpillars defoliate the ragwort plants, but the effect is limited as the plants may regrow.

**Ragwort Flea Beetle** - The small golden-brown ragwort flea beetle has become the most effective agent on ragwort. The grubs damage the rosettes during winter and kill the plant, achieving dramatic reductions in ragwort populations.



*Cinnabar Caterpillars.*



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