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THE BIOLOGY AND CONTROL OF  
*EHRHARTA VILLOSA*, SOUTH AFRICAN  
PYPGRASS.

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## ABSTRACT

The biology of an adventive weed, *Ehrharta villosa* (F. Schult) was investigated at Turakina beach, Rangitikei, in order to understand its means of spread and to discover a way of controlling the plant. Two populations have been found at Turakina, the smaller being on the dune system and the other in a nearby pine plantation.

Studies of the seed biology showed that although viability was high (ca. 80%), the numbers of seed produced per m<sup>2</sup> was low (8 to 102 seeds/m<sup>2</sup>). Dispersal of these seeds was limited to within 5m of the source population and no seeds were discovered in the soil seed bank. Circumstantial evidence suggests seed predation to be a contributing factor to this. Germination tests in sand showed seeds were capable of emerging from depths of up to 6cm.

Stages in seedling development were described. Pypgrass displays a tall habit with internodes which elongate soon after germination, but its seedlings are less vigorous than most other grasses and weeds. The morphology and growth pattern of pypgrass allows it to have a smothering effect on other vegetation.

The potential for vegetative spread by rhizome fragments was investigated by burial and reexcavation of fragments. Pypgrass is capable of reproduction from rhizome fragments of varying lengths. Mapping a 400m<sup>2</sup> area of the advancing front of one population showed that over one year pypgrass had spread between 4.1 and 9.0m. Species associated with pypgrass were recorded at

the beginning and the end of the study to give some indication of the effect of pypgrass density on those associated species. In quadrats where pypgrass was most dense, fewer species overall were found.

Dune species including pypgrass were tested for the presence of mycorrhizal fungi. Pypgrass proved to have the greatest percentage mycorrhizal infection (88.9%) with the other species having significantly lower percent infection. Mycorrhizal association may give an advantage to pypgrass by allowing greater uptake of water and minerals compared with other plants.

Leaf anatomical studies confirmed pypgrass is a C3 plant and other features such as sunken stomata and inrolled leaves may be of adaptive value in a coastal dune habitat.

Different methods for control of pypgrass were considered and it was decided that herbicide was the best option, because of the large area involved and the nature of the underground rhizomes. Field trials were used to evaluate haloxyfop for control of pypgrass. A single application did not completely control pypgrass, regardless of time of application. Two, split, applications also did not achieve complete control of leaf and rhizome, however split applications ensured tiller regeneration remained low throughout the trial.

Haloxyfop can generally be used selectively among dicotyledonous plants and monocotyledons that are not in the family Poaceae, but

it can harm some of these monocotyledons. Pot trials on dune monocotyledons associated with pypgrass demonstrated that marram was the only species significantly affected by haloxyfop, and even this plant was not completely killed. The trial established that haloxyfop would not adversely affect any native monocotyledonous plants growing in the area of pypgrass.

This study has gathered the necessary information to decide on a course of action. Pypgrass is at present confined to the Turakina area in two discrete populations. Use of herbicide (haloxyfop) in a number of split applications would prevent regrowth from rhizomes. Regeneration of pypgrass by seed after herbicidal control is not likely, allowing eradication to be an achievable aim.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	page
ABSTRACT . . . . .	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	v
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	xi
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
2. PYPGRASS BIOLOGY . . . . .	9
<u>2.1 DESCRIPTION</u> . . . . .	9
<u>2.2 DISTRIBUTION</u> . . . . .	9
2.2.1 South Africa. . . . .	9
2.2.2 Australia. . . . .	11
2.2.3 New Zealand. . . . .	11
<u>2.3 ECOLOGY OF THE AREA</u> . . . . .	13
<u>2.4 WEED POTENTIAL OF PYPGRASS</u> . . . . .	16
2.4.1 Growth Habit. . . . .	16
2.4.1.1 Personal Observations. . . . .	16
2.4.2 Affiliated Species. . . . .	17
2.4.3 Polyploidy. . . . .	22

3. SEED BIOLOGY . . . . .	24
<u>3.1 SEED PRODUCTION</u> . . . . .	24
3.1.1 Introduction. . . . .	24
3.1.2 Methods. . . . .	25
3.1.2.1 Seed Number per Seed Head. . . . .	25
3.1.2.2 Density of Fertile Tillers. . . . .	27
3.1.2.3 Total Seed Production. . . . .	27
3.1.3 Results. . . . .	27
3.1.3.1 Seed number per Seed Head. . . . .	27
3.1.3.2 Density of Fertile Tillers. . . . .	30
3.1.3.3 Total Seed Production. . . . .	30
3.1.4 Discussion. . . . .	32
3.1.5 Conclusions. . . . .	35
<u>3.2 DISPERSAL.</u> . . . . .	35
3.2.1 Introduction. . . . .	35
3.2.2 Morphology. . . . .	37
3.2.3 Mechanism of Dispersal. . . . .	37
3.2.4 Seed Traps. . . . .	41
3.2.4.1 Introduction. . . . .	41
3.2.4.2 Methods. . . . .	43
3.2.4.3 Results. . . . .	43
3.2.4.4 Discussion. . . . .	45
3.2.4.5 Conclusions. . . . .	48
3.2.5 Seed Bank. . . . .	49
3.2.5.1 Introduction. . . . .	49
3.2.5.2 Methods. . . . .	50
3.2.5.3 Results. . . . .	50



3.2.5.4	Discussion. . . . .	50
3.2.5.5	Conclusions. . . . .	52
<u>3.3</u>	<u>EMERGENCE FROM BURIAL</u> . . . . .	52
3.3.1	Introduction. . . . .	52
3.3.2	Methods. . . . .	52
3.3.3	Results. . . . .	53
3.3.4	Discussion. . . . .	55
3.3.5	Conclusions. . . . .	56
<b>4.</b>	<b>VEGETATIVE GROWTH</b> . . . . .	57
<u>4.1</u>	<u>SEEDLING GROWTH</u> . . . . .	57
4.1.1	Introduction. . . . .	57
4.1.2	Methods. . . . .	57
4.1.3	Results. . . . .	59
4.1.4	Discussion. . . . .	64
4.1.5	Conclusions. . . . .	65
<u>4.2</u>	<u>REGENERATION FROM RHIZOME</u> . . . . .	65
4.2.1	Introduction. . . . .	65
4.2.2	Methods. . . . .	66
4.2.3	Results. . . . .	67
4.2.4	Discussion. . . . .	67
4.2.5	Conclusions. . . . .	71
<u>4.3</u>	<u>RATE OF VEGETATIVE SPREAD</u> . . . . .	71
4.3.1	Introduction. . . . .	71

4.3.2 Methods. . . . . 71

4.3.3 Results. . . . . 74

4.3.4 Discussion. . . . . 81

4.3.5 Conclusions. . . . . 83

5. OTHER ECOLOGICAL DATA . . . . . 85

5.1 LEAF ANATOMY . . . . . 85

5.1.1 Introduction. . . . . 85

5.1.2 Methods. . . . . 85

5.1.3 Results. . . . . 86

5.1.4 Discussion. . . . . 86

5.1.5 Conclusions. . . . . 90

5.2 SOIL MYCORRHIZA . . . . . 91

5.2.1 Introduction. . . . . 91

5.2.2 Methods. . . . . 92

5.2.3 Results. . . . . 94

5.2.4 Discussion. . . . . 100

5.2.5 Conclusions. . . . . 102

6. CONTROL OF PYPGRASS . . . . . 103

6.1 CONTROL OPTIONS . . . . . 103

6.1.1 Mechanical methods. . . . . 103

6.1.2 Biological control. . . . . 104

6.1.3 Use of herbicide. . . . . 104

<u>6.2</u> <u>HERBICIDE SELECTION</u> . . . . .	105
6.2.1 Activity in the Plant. . . . .	105
6.2.2 Activity in the Soil. . . . .	106
6.2.3 Mode of Action. . . . .	107
6.2.4 Selectivity. . . . .	107
6.2.5 Translocation. . . . .	108
<u>6.3</u> <u>FIELD TRIALS</u> . . . . .	109
6.3.1 Introduction. . . . .	109
6.3.2 Methods. . . . .	109
6.3.3 Results. . . . .	113
6.3.3.1 Vegetation Scores. . . . .	113
6.3.3.2 Regrowth Assessment. . . . .	118
6.3.4 Discussion. . . . .	118
<u>6.4</u> <u>POT TRIALS</u> . . . . .	124
6.4.1 Introduction. . . . .	124
6.4.2 Methods. . . . .	124
6.4.3 Results. . . . .	126
6.4.4 Discussion . . . . .	128
<u>6.5</u> <u>CONCLUSIONS.</u> . . . . .	133
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS.</b> . . . . .	135
<b>REFERENCES.</b> . . . . .	140

LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND PLATES.

	page
Plate 1.1	Pypgrass creates a virtual monoculture on the dunes. . . . . 2
Plate 1.2	In summer, pypgrass has very little leaf. . . . . 3
Plate 1.3	In winter, pypgrass has relatively lush foliage. . . . . 4
Plate 1.4	Pypgrass can climb to a height of at least two metres. . . . . 5
Figure 2.1	Distribution of pypgrass in South Africa. . . . . 10
Figure 2.2	Distribution of pypgrass in New Zealand. . . . . 12
Figure 2.3	The Turakina Beach area. . . . . 14
Plate 2.1	Pypgrass climbing in a lupin bush. . . . . 18
Plate 2.2	Pypgrass smothering boxthorn. . . . . 19
Plate 2.3	Pypgrass climbing up a <i>Macrocarpa</i> tree. . . . . 20
Plate 2.4	Underground rhizomes of pypgrass. . . . . 21
Table 3.1	Number of seeds per seedhead in pypgrass. . . . . 29
Table 3.2	Density of fertile tillers of pypgrass. . . . . 31
Table 3.3	Total pypgrass seed production. . . . . 31
Figure 3.1	Pypgrass floret. . . . . 38
Figure 3.2	Pypgrass dispersal unit. . . . . 39
Plate 3.1	Inflorescence and single floret of pypgrass. . . . . 40
Figure 3.3	Plate type seed trap. . . . . 42
Figure 3.4	Funnel type seed trap. . . . . 44
Figure 3.5	Pattern of seed dispersal around pypgrass populations. . . . . 46
Table 3.4	Number of dispersal units per square metre. . . . . 47

Table 3.5	Number of buried pypgrass seedlings that emerged. . . . .	54
Figure 4.1	Diagram of a grass plant. . . . .	58
Figure 4.2	Pattern of seedling growth in pypgrass. . .	60
Figure 4.3	Pypgrass - Three leaf stage. . . . .	61
Figure 4.4	Pypgrass - Four leaf stage. . . . .	62
Figure 4.5	Pypgrass - Tillering. . . . .	63
Figure 4.6	Rhizome fragments that grew shoots. . . . .	68
Table 4.1	The specific axillary buds that shoots grew from. . . . .	69
Plate 4.1	Mapping area, 1994. . . . .	72
Plate 4.2	Mapping area, 1995. . . . .	73
Figure 4.7	Mapping of an area of beach pypgrass. . . .	75
Table 4.2	Distance from the western boundary of the study area to the colonising pypgrass plants.	76
Figure 4.8	Density of pypgrass tillers within the study area. . . . .	78
Figure 4.9	Changes in species composition in the study area. . . . .	79
Plate 5.1	Transverse section of median vascular bundle of pypgrass leaf. . . . .	87
Plate 5.2	Transverse section of pypgrass leaf showing semi radiate mesophyll. . . . .	88
Plate 5.3	Transverse section of pypgrass leaf showing sunken stoma. . . . .	89
Table 5.1	Species tested for presence of mycorrhiza. .	93

Figure 5.1	Percentage mycorrhizal infection of tested species. . . . .	96
Plate 5.4	Extracellular hyphae. . . . .	97
Plate 5.5	A mycorrhizal vesicle seen in the root cortex of pypgrass. . . . .	98
Plate 5.6	Intracellular hyphae. . . . .	99
Figure 6.1	Site of herbicide trial. . . . .	110
Table 6.1	Treatments given in herbicide trial. . . . .	112
Plate 6.1	Pypgrass scoring 2. . . . .	114
Plate 6.2	Pypgrass scoring 5. . . . .	115
Plate 6.3	Pypgrass scoring 8. . . . .	116
Table 6.2	Effect of haloxyfop on pypgrass as assessed by scoring. . . . .	118
Figure 6.2	Effect of a single application of haloxyfop. . . . .	119
Figure 6.3	Effect of a split application of haloxyfop. . . . .	120
Table 6.3	Tiller regrowth in trial plots. . . . .	121
Table 6.4	Species tested in pot trials. . . . .	125
Table 6.5	Effect of haloxyfop on pot trial plants. . . . .	128
Plate 6.4	Effect of haloxyfop on Flax. . . . .	129
Plate 6.5	Effect of haloxyfop on Pingao. . . . .	130
Plate 6.6	Effect of haloxyfop on Isolepis. . . . .	131
Plate 6.7	Effect of haloxyfop on Marram. . . . .	132