Broom rape

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BROOM RAPE

BROOM RAPE (Orobanche australiana) is a parasite which becomes attached to the roots of other plants. It is not very selective regarding hosts and has been found parasitising many species, but particularly clovers.

In most cases the broom rape is not present in sufficient numbers to cause serious adverse effects, but on some properties in the South-West a large population of the parasite has reduced the growth of clovers and also caused premature drying off in the spring.

In Europe some species of Orobanche are suspected of being mildly toxic but although O. australiana is very widespread in this State we have no records of stock disorders or losses being attributed to it.

Broom rape is very spasmodic in occurrence. In some years it is very plentiful and at other times comparatively scarce in the same locality. Its incidence is obviously affected by seasonal conditions and long, wet winters appear to favour its growth.

Attempts at Control

Eradication in the South-West is almost impossible as plants occur freely on uncleared country and each plant produces a large number of very fine seeds. The spasmodic appearance of broom rape suggests that some of these are capable of remaining dormant in the soil for considerable periods.

The weed has caused greatest concern in the Cowaramup-Margaret River district and possible means of control have been investigated at the Bramley Research Station. Mowing or rolling to prevent seed production did not prove practical. Cutting sufficiently close to the ground was difficult and successive germinations of broom rape meant that plants were maturing over an extended period in the spring.

The hormone-like chemicals were not effective at rates which clovers were able to tolerate and germination over a period added to the difficulties of chemical control.

Most Effective Treatment

The most effective treatment, which caused a considerable reduction in the broom rape, was to plough after the weed had started growth but not necessarily emerged from the ground. This was followed by cultivation and the sowing of oats, with subterranean clover and rye grass.

In recent years broom rape has become more evident in the wheat-belt but, so far, has not proved as troublesome as in the wetter districts of the South-West.
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