

Pasture Pests:

Argentine Stem Weevil (*Listronous bonariensis*)

Information Sheet

Identification.

This small introduced South American weevil is estimated to cost New Zealand pastoral farmers over \$280 million dollars in lost production every year and therefore is in the top three of New Zealand's worst insect pests.

Although very difficult to detect by the eye the adult Argentine Stem Weevil (ASW) is, hard bodied, less than 3.5 cm long and grey to brown in colour with three stripes on its body. The white legless larvae live in the tillers of most agriculturally important grasses.



Distribution and damage.

Argentine Stem Weevil are widely spread throughout every region in New Zealand. Driven by high daily temperatures ASW can go through a number of generations every year, pest status is reached when they have two or more generations typically from Canterbury upwards.

Although it has been noted in Southland that ASW numbers are on the rise. ASW is a major pest in Italian ryegrass, endophyte free perennial and hybrid ryegrasses, cereals and maize. While adults feed on these plants it's the eggs they lay into the tillers of the host plants that intern hatch into larvae that do the most significant damage.

Each Argentine Stem weevil larva could potentially destroy up to 8 ryegrass tillers as they mature into adults and are mobile enough to move to new plants if required. The larvae pass through 5 stages before maturing into adults and as new adults can start laying eggs straight away.

Egg laying is controlled by day length and normally stops mid to end of March. Adult weevils fly on mass dispersal flights that take place on calm and sunny days.

Life cycle.

Once an Argentine stem weevil has located a mate, they will breed. After a period of gestation, the female will begin to lay her eggs. Most female stem weevil will lay as many as 36 or 37 eggs over approximately 40 days.

The female will select a suitable grass stem, burrow into the leaf sheath tissue and oviposit up to 3 brown, ovoid shaped eggs less than 1mm in length inside the sheath of the grass plant. Egg laying starts in July and is thought to finish in March of the following year. The egg is known to hatch within as little as 10 days in very warm weather and as much as 20-30 days in cooler conditions.

For more information or to discuss how to protect your pasture against Argentine Stem Weevil please [contact Specialty Seeds](#)



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