



***Ventenata dubia*: An Increasing Concern to the Inland Northwest Region**

By Dr. Tim Prather

Ventenata (*Ventenata dubia* [Leers] Coss), also known as North Africa grass, is an exotic winter-annual grass of increasing concern to the Inland Northwest region, yet little research has been conducted on its biology and management. The presence of *ventenata* was first reported in 1957 in northern Idaho. By the mid-1980s, survey records indicated that *ventenata* was present throughout the Pacific Northwest where it was found to be weedy in bluegrass, alfalfa, winter wheat, pasture and rangeland. The first entry into a new area may occur through roadside introduction or contaminated hay. *Ventenata* is found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Montana.

Impacts

Botanists have reported increased dominance of *ventenata* in grasslands previously dominated by downy brome (cheatgrass, *Bromus tectorum*). Recent increases in *ventenata* populations have also been reported to the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) and the USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA) field offices and university extension-systems across a number of perennial grass production systems including pasture, hay, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land where significant negative impacts have occurred. The USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center (Pullman, WA) conducted a distribution survey of *ventenata* in the Inland Northwest in 2008. *Ventenata* was present in 74% of the counties surveyed. Questionnaires were also distributed to regional NRCS field offices to determine the types of land use affected and current management practices. Half of the people who responded to the questionnaire stated that *ventenata* was a problem in pasture, hay, or CRP production systems. Timothy (*Phleum* spp.) hay seems particularly susceptible to damage and some farmers in north central Idaho report disking timothy fields that are only 3 to 4 years old because of *ventenata*. In addition to competitive interactions, *ventenata* has wiry stems that can stop a swather, preventing harvest in some cases. *Ventenata* appears to have little forage value with infested areas not sustaining livestock.

Biology and Identification

Ventenata grows across a wide range of precipitation that spans 14 to 44 inches per year. *Ventenata* germinates in the fall, typically about 2 weeks after downy brome.

Flowering occurs in the spring and seed shatter in early summer. The plant tends to be 12 to 30 inches tall, with wiring stems, and leaves clumped into a bunch at the base. A good description of the plant can be found [online](#).

Management

Control of ventenata is not achieved with mowing. Continued fallow (chemical or mechanical) for a couple of years has dropped populations to low levels. Grazing does not seem likely since animals tend to avoid it. Several herbicides have been effective; the challenge has been finding products that are labeled for use in a number of crops. Herbicide products that show promise include Plateau, Paramount, Journey, Sinbar and Outrider. Herbicide labels, of course, must be consulted to ensure proper use. Quite often the challenge is to control ventenata while preventing perennial grass injury.

Researchers at the University of Idaho are working with the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center in Pullman to conduct research on the biology and management of this weedy annual grass. We are developing recommendations based on existing perennial grass cover to determine appropriate management options.

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