

# Have you seen this Alert Weed?

June 2011

## Mexican Feathergrass

*Nassella tenuissima*



### WHAT IS IT?

- A perennial tussock grass
- Native to central and south America
- A major pasture and environmental weed in temperate Australia
- Similar to serrated tussock, a highly invasive weed in Australia
- Also known as: Texas tussock grass, White tussock, Ponytail grass
- Synonyms: *Stipa cirrosa*, *Stipa geniculata*, *Stipa mendocina*, *Stipa tenuissima* var. *panicola*, *Stipa tenuissima* var. *oreophila*.

### WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

- A low protein, high fibre grass with no grazing value - pure stands would render a paddock worthless
- Unchecked, it can destroy the biodiversity of native grasslands and riparian areas, and open woodlands
- It can survive in extremely variable climates and soil types, and tolerates long periods of drought
- It is a highly adaptable grass that could spread throughout most states of Australia, causing major economic and environmental damage



## What are State Alert Weeds?

These are invasive weeds that are not known to be in South Australia, or if present, occur in low numbers in a restricted area, and are still capable of being eradicated. An Alert Weed would pose a serious threat to the State's primary industries, natural environments or human health if it became established here. All Alert Weeds are declared under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*: their transport and sale are prohibited (Sect. 175 and 177), plants must be destroyed (Sect. 182), and if found on your land their presence must be notified to NRM authorities (Sect. 180) – refer overleaf.

## DESCRIPTION

A perennial, densely tufted tussock grass, with flowering stems growing up to 70 cm high. Seed heads are 15–25 cm long. Seeds have a small pointed tip and a long bent tail, and resemble a large feather when clumped together at the end of the flower spike. Leaves are thread-like, and roll smoothly between the fingers. The leaves have serrations and feel rough when sliding the fingers down the leaf blade. Tussocks are white in winter, and are very similar in appearance to serrated tussock.

## HOW IT SPREADS

Reproduces by seed during mid-spring to summer. Seed tends to fall nearby the plant and can remain viable for up to 4 years. Seeds are not usually dispersed by wind but are spread by flooding, vehicles, clothing on animal fur and feet, and can be transported long distances along livestock routes.

## HABITAT

It is capable of surviving in extremely variable climates and soil types, and is able to tolerate prolonged periods of drought.

## ORIGIN

Mexican feathergrass is native to central and south America, (Chile, Argentina, Mexico, New Mexico, and Texas).

## DISTRIBUTION IN AUSTRALIA

**Current:** Grown in gardens in New South Wales and Victoria, but is not known to be naturalised in Australia to date. In 2009 it was recovered from several gardens in the Fleurieu Peninsula and South-east region of South Australia.

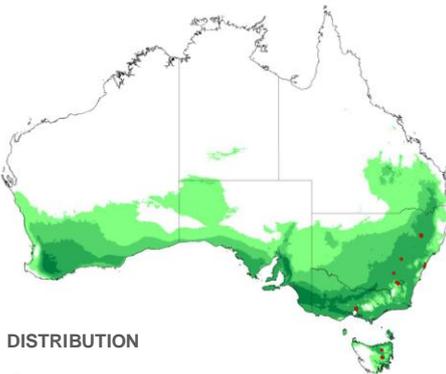
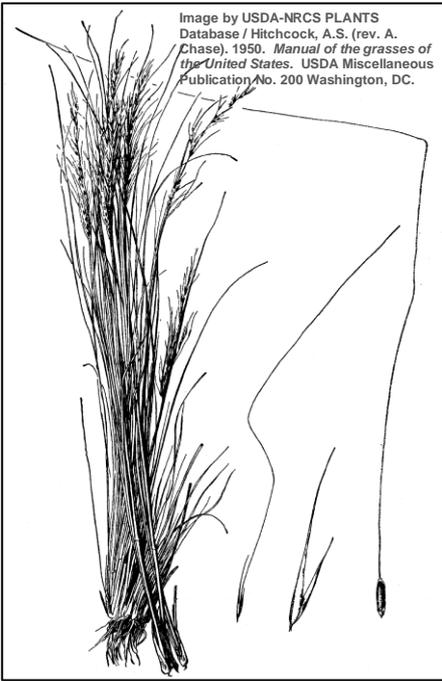
**Potential:** Based on climate suitability Mexican feathergrass could grow in most of the southern, agricultural zone of South Australia, with the exception of the highest rainfall areas.

## HOW IT GOT HERE

First detected in Victorian nurseries in 1998. Mislabeled as *Stipa* 'Capriccio', *Stipa capillata*, or the native grass *Austrostipa elegantissima*, it was sold by hardware chains and garden centres in Queensland, NSW and South Australia in 2008.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Be on the alert for this plant using this Fact Sheet as a guide. If you see a suspicious plant that may be this State Alert Weed, please report it to your local Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board (contact details at [www.nrm.sa.gov.au](http://www.nrm.sa.gov.au)). For more information on weeds, including Alerts, contact your local NRM Board or visit either [www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity) (phone 08 8303 9620) or [www.weeds.org.au](http://www.weeds.org.au).



### DISTRIBUTION

- Current distribution based on herbarium records
- Potential distribution based on climate modelling

Disclaimer: This publication is provided for the purpose of disseminating information relating to scientific and technical matters. The Government of South Australia does not accept liability for any loss and/or damage, including financial loss, resulting from the reliance upon any information, advice or recommendations contained in this publication. The contents of this publication should not necessarily be taken to represent the views of the participating organisations.

