Control of gorse regrowth by angora wethers

A.R. Harradine^a and A.L. Jones

^aDepartment of Agriculture, Research Laboratories, New Town, Tas 7008. ^bDepartment of Agriculture, Prospect Offices, Prospect Vale, Tas 7250.

Goats have been evaluated for the control of a wide range of scrub weeds including gorse. Earlier trials have mostly involved feral goats, and the ability of Angora goats to control gorse has not previously been reported. The work reported here is part of a larger trial to evaluate Angora goats for gorse control and mohair production in the free-ranging grazing situation of the Tasmanian Midlands where gorse is estimated to cover up to 10% of the non-arable area.

Methods

The experiment was established 20 km west of Campbell Town, Tasmania. Trial plots consisted of approximately 0.5 ha gorse dominated unimproved pasture and 0.5 ha of *Lolium perenne* dominated pasture. Gorse bushes were burned immediately prior to the introduction of 2-tooth Angora wethers on 21 December 1982 at unreplicated stocking rates of 6 and 10 ha'. Six pairs of gorse bushes were selected in each plot with one bush of each pair being excluded from browsing by a mesh enclosure. Control of gorse regrowth *was* estimated by the difference in volume (assuming hushes to be cylindrical) of the bushes in each pair as measured at intervals until 10 April, 1984. Goats were shorn in April and September 1983 and in April 1984 and the fleeces weighed and valued.

Results and Discussion

Angora goats at 6 and 10 ha had achieved 96 and 94% control respectively of gorse regrowth as at 10 April 1984 (Fig I). This compares with 82 and 96% control by Angora wethers at 6 and 10 ha⁻¹ respectively achieved after 2 years of browsing in a similar trial where goats were introduced 12 months after the gorse had been burned (Harradine and Jones, unpublished data). Observation of pasture availability throughout the year indicated that goats generally preferred gorse browsing to pasture grazing when both were available.

The total value per plot of mohair produced between April 1983 and 1984 was \$99.00 and \$165.30 for the 6 and 10 ha⁻¹ stocking rates respectively. This compares favourably with a gross return of \$92/ha for Polwarth wethers run under similar conditions (Harradine and Jones, unpublished data).

Angora goats can both control gorse regrowth after burning and provide mohair production in non-arable, gorse infested country in the Tasmanian Midlands. Goats should be introduced into the area as soon as possible after burning for the maximum short term control of gorse regrowth.

