FENCE SHEEP OFF BARLEY GRASS

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Summary

The spread of barley grass from seed carried by sheep has been much reduced by fencing off infested areas. A programme of control is now succeeding which previously failed when sheep were allowed to lie on infested ground.

BARLEY GRASS (*Hordeum murinum*) appeared on the writer's small farm in 1958 and was attacked by means then advocated for its control through prevention of seeding. Barley grass plants were spot sprayed with 2,2-DPA, dug out or decapitated. These methods failed, although they succeeded in confining barley grass to small areas. Paraquat used since 1964 gave better control of dense patches, but at the cost of musky storksbill (*Erodium moschatum*) established in all treated areas. However, barley grass kept appearing in about six new places each year, in perhaps two of which viable seed would be formed before the infestation was discovered. At most, only one area could be cleared of barley grass each year, so that the number of barley grass colonies was still increasing in spite of diligent searching, digging out and spot spraying.

Since 1966, areas suspected or known to contain appreciable numbers of viable seed have been fenced off, grazed a few times between January and September by sheep which were allowed in only to eat on their feet. This procedure has greatly helped to bring barley grass under control. Only about one new infestation of barley grass appears each year, never containing many plants. In earlier times as many as a thousand barley grass plants appeared in a new infestation arising from seed carried in the wool of only sixty sheep. Barley grass is no longer collected in sacks, but in very small plastic bags. Half the lamb pelts at one time were punctured, but none is now.

Keeping stock off infested areas from September to January makes barley grass plants grow conspicuously so they can all be dealt with before seed falls. There are no plants with short seed-heads as is common under normal grazing. Most of the barley grass plants come to seed in a short definite season, in contrast with the extended period of seeding under grazing. A further advantage in fencing arises from the inability of barley grass to regenerate from seed beneath tall, dense grass which can often be grown under controlled grazing. Indeed, barley grass has disappeared from several areas entirely as a result of removing sheep.