

## **Common Ragweed – invaders across the frontline**

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*Across Europe the spread of a super-weed is on the rise. Ambrosia artemisiifolia, best known as Common ragweed has become more and more frequent. For a long time, its spread has been halted from reaching the Scandinavian peninsula due to the harsh conditions it faces but as global changes lead to warmer climates, populations have been able to prosper even here. Due to greater globalisation with transport of goods across long distances, invasive alien species are able to hitch a ride across their natural limits and spread into new habitats, even outcompeting native species, threatening their existence. What can be done to stop their spread?*

### **New world species spreading in the old world**

Originally native to North America, the Common ragweed was unintentionally introduced to Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century together with imported contaminated sunflower seeds. In habitats similar to its native, the plant was able to disperse across massive areas, mainly in Italy, France and Hungary. Today, the weed causes big problems to human health, agriculture and biodiversity. It is the major source of allergenic pollen in Central Europe and can by dispersal over long distance and fast growth outcompete native species even leading to extinctions.

#### **Threat in Northern Europe**

The establishment of populations in Northern Europe have for a long time been stopped partly by differences from its native habitat which is more dry and warmer but also by factors in the plants reproduction. The plant doesn't flower until late in the summer, mainly August and September, when the climate already has started becoming colder with longer nights. This leads to it not being able to complete its annual cycle and the main source of growth in the population instead comes from import of birdseeds, mainly from Hungary. In recent years a trend of longer and warmer summers have been seen as a result of global change caused by human activity. These alteration of the environment favours species such as Common ragweed helping in their establishment. With more individuals being able to complete their reproductive cycle a selection for earlier flowering has been seen, further helping its spread.

#### **Hopes of a better future**

The Common ragweed has been able to get a foothold on Swedish soil but its spread is still in its early stages. By establishing a proper legal framework against imports known to be a source of seeds of the weed as well as getting the knowledge out to the public, counteraction at an early stage is possible. This has been seen to work for instance in Switzerland, a country surrounded by regions where the plant is at its most common, but where these actions have been able to stop the plant from reaching within country borders. Hopefully through this we can stop this invasion.

### **Further reading**

Henriksson, O. 2016. Invasiva främmande arter – framtida hot mot biologiska mångfald  
Independent Project in Biology, 1BG210, Uppsala University