

Tumbleweeds get new enemies

United Press International
RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Tumbling tumbleweeds, the rolling shrubs that add a touch of color to western movies, have become such a nuisance that scientists are adding two new insects to this continent in hopes of controlling them.

Dr. Dick Goeden of University of California at Riverside is doing some delicate tinkering with nature, but he says insects may someday replace tractors and herbicides in controlling plant pests.

The tumbleweed, or Russian thistle, grows across a wide band of southeastern Russia and western Siberia but seldom does it grow as large as it does in the United States.

Tumbleweed seed came into South Dakota in shipments of flax seed in the early 1870s. By the latter part of that century it was reported as a pest in states and 13 Canadian provinces.

The control project was started by the Department of Agriculture biological control laboratory in Albany, Calif. The bugs were shipped to Goeden who began efforts to establish colonies.

Goeden, an entomologist in the

still unusual field of biological weed control, says it is a science for patient people.

"The rule of thumb is, that it's a seven-to-10 year period between saying let's go to work on a weed and the effective abolishment of insect predators and parasites," he said.

Scientists found the two insects — the stem-borer and the leaf-miner — in Pakistan. The bugs were tested there and then transferred here. Now the stem-borer is regarded as "established" here, meaning it has survived for at least three generations.

The leaf-miner was only recently colonized. But the stem-borer is already at work chomping into tumbleweeds in select locations in Southern California, Arizona, Idaho and Nevada.

Part of the long process involves

two or three years of tests in the bugs' native land to make sure they will not attack useful plants. Dr. Lloyd Andres of the USDA said it was determined first that the two insects would not attack sugar beets and spinach, close cousins of the tumbleweed.

He said that the stem-borer will attack only tumbleweed and a poisonous weed native to the Great Basin which, he said, is a desirable spin-off.

The tumbleweed propagates itself as it rolls along, driven by the wind. Its round shape once it separates from its root system helps it spread seed far and wide.

The Russian version is less apt to tumble. It's much smaller and scraggly.

"A recent group of Russian scientists visiting UCR were amazed at the size of our tumbleweeds," Goeden said.

"In Russia, where the thistle has several natural enemies feeding on it, it may have a shortened stem with only four or five branches and stand a foot or so tall.

Our Western version will get to two or three feet in diameter.

The California Department of Transportation spends \$1.5 million on tumbleweed control and cleanup every year. Farmers and property owners spend many millions clearing tumbleweeds.

"Last year was an excellent year for the tumbleweed," Goeden said. "Normally soil moisture is depleted in August, but the opportunistic weeds made full use of the rains that came with Hurricane Doreen."

Now farmers and clean-up crews have allies. The stem-borer feeds within the branches of the weed, hollowing them out so they lose water. The leaf-miner attacks the plant leaves.

Stripping of tropical forests could mean bird extinction

By KATHRYN GOFF
North American migratory birds face a "new wave of extinction," because of recent stripping of South American forests, according to Dr. Joseph J. Hickey. Hickey, a guest speaker of the department of wildlife and fisheries sciences, spoke on "The Ecology of Recent Vertebrate Extinction."

Hickey told the crowd of about 200 Tuesday night that stripped tropical rain forests in South America result in rangelands. These rangelands, composed of laterite-clay-like-soils, incapable of soaking in water, allow the top soil to wash away.

"You can just watch the silt wash away," he said. The laterite soil, when exposed to the sun, bakes solid. The plant and animal life that

once flourished in the rain forests cannot survive on these sterile lands. Such North American migratory birds as redstarts "will undoubtedly go down in number," Hickey said.

Although man has caused such birds as the Great Auk, the heath hen and the dodo to vanish, Hickey said that man has nurtured other species.

Conservation groups are now selling so much bird seed to people who want birds at their houses, Hickey said, that the evening grosbeak population has increased. Because of the cattle industry, the cattle egret has become one of the most common birds in Texas. Birds that were reported as rare by Audubon over two centuries ago are now common, he added.

"We are always finding new species of birds, and insects never described before are discovered," said Hickey.

Hickey received his doctoral degree from the University of Michigan. He is a professor of wildlife ecology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. For the extent of his 30 year career, Hickey has researched population ecology, the effects of pollution on bird life, and rare and endangered species.

An author of over 100 papers and articles on wildlife, he wrote the book "A Guide to Bird Watching" and edited "Peregrine Falcon Population: Their Biology and Decline." Hickey has received the coveted Aldo Leopold Award, and the Arthur A. Allen Medal.

Honors Aggie sons

Antique piano given

A solid rosewood, 130-year-old square grand piano has been given to Texas A&M University by Mr. and Mrs. Cramon Stanton of Houston.

It was presented in honor of their Aggie sons, 1974 graduate Charles and John '66.

Built around 1850 by the Chase Piano Co. of Ripley, Ohio, the instrument is located in the Schiwetz Lounge on the first floor of the Memorial Student Center. An identical piano was in President Abraham Lincoln's White House. Another is in the museum at the Washington on the Brazos.

Texas A&M officials including Dr. John Koldus, vice president for student services, and Robert Walker, vice president for development, attended the formal Monday presentation. Singing Cadets member and pianist David Stevens played for the ceremony.

The piano will be played on special occasions.

MSC President Lynn Gibson expressed student appreciation for the gift. "Your gift will be appreciated by thousands and thousands of Texas A&M students through the years," Gibson said.

The Stantons acquired the antique from a Mt. Gilead, Ohio, stone cutter. Handbuilt, the piano has carved cabriole legs and hand-turned screws. The instrument was appraised at \$10,000.



Connie and Cramon Stanton of Houston observe David Stevens as he plays on the historic grand piano they donated to the University. It is valued at \$10,000.

Cost of A&M traditional formal other bashes continues to rise

By JUDITH DUNN
Class formals are an expensive Texas A&M tradition, and the costs are continuing to rise.

Hal Gaines, associate director for the Memorial Student Center, is in charge of the Senior Class bash at Lakeview, the senior banquet, and the formal dances held this year.

"We've already spent approximately \$2,000 more than last year's senior class," he said.

This year's "Senior Weekend," April 28 and 29, will cost the Class of '78 approximately \$15,000, Gaines said.

"This price includes the costs for the bash at Lakeview, the banquet before the formals, and also includes the cost for two dances this year instead of just one," he explained.

This year there will be two dances going on at the same time. This results from the large turnout last year.

"The other classes don't spend as much as the senior class, but this is their last year, and they want to make it their best," Gaines said.

The junior class formal will be held Feb. 25 in the ballroom of the

Zachry Engineering Center. Jane Eike, class chairman and treasurer of finances for the formal.

"It will cost the junior class approximately \$1,400," she said.

This is the cost for only the formal, including expenses for the band and Eike said.

The sophomore class will only one formal to pay for, to Mary Ann Wallace, adviser to sophomore class.

With refreshments and all pay for, expenses will total somewhere between \$1,100 and \$1,200, she said. The sophomore class hold their formal in the Zachry Engineering Center on Feb. 11.

James Randolph, adviser to freshman class, said that he hold their formal on Feb. 15 at MSC. This formal will cost approximately \$1,800, he said.

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