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# Bug News: March 2020

## A wet summer – what does this mean for pests?

by PAUL HORNE

Unlike most parts of Australia, southern Victoria has had rain from spring through summer. This is likely to alter pest conditions for some species in Autumn.

The good news is that pests that live below the ground, like red-headed cockchafer, are likely to have suffered higher than usual mortality, simply by drowning. If the small beetle larvae that hatch in spring encounter water-logged soil, then many will not survive. However, black-headed cockchafer that were in the egg stage over summer do not usually hatch until around April. So, there is still likely to be survival and appearance of black-headed cockchafer this year.

Slugs could be much more important pests this season, even in paddocks where pest pressure was low last year. This is because in a normal, dry summer the pest slugs shut down (aestivate) and wait until there is moisture again. So, this might mean from mid-November to March there is no slug activity. Slugs shut down like this because of lack of moisture, not high temperatures.

If moisture is present then slugs are continuous breeders, and so between November 2019 and March 2020 there will have been at least one and possibly two generations of slugs produced that we do not normally see. Slugs are hermaphrodites, meaning that each individual can produce eggs and they produce a lot of eggs. Species such as *Deroceras reticulatum* (grey field slug) could produce between 100 and 1,000 eggs per individual. This means that if you had 1 slug per square metre last year then you could have hundreds per square metre this autumn!

### What to do?

I suggest that you assess the risk of slug damage now, don't wait until the crop is sown and damage is being done.

Slugs are active now with wet conditions so simply put some tiles or sacks into the paddocks (especially those to be sown to canola) and check on the level of activity. A guide to identifying slugs is available here:

[https://grdc.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0034/198916/grdcbpgslug.pdf.pdf](https://grdc.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0034/198916/grdcbpgslug.pdf.pdf)

Or if you have any particular questions, then please contact me.

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Prepared by IPM Technologies P/L for the Upper Hopkins Land Management Group IPM FARM PROJECT

This project is supported by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme

