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THE DOWNY BROME GRASS IN IOWA

H. E. JAQUES

Our state has a number of troublesome weed grasses, worst of which at the present time is, likely, the Squirrel-tail Grass (*Hordeum jubatum* L.) which is now to be found almost everywhere within the state and is very annoying in crowding out better grasses and in injuring livestock. Only a few decades ago it was scarce within our borders. While theoretically it is easily controlled and though it is hated by farmers everywhere it thrives and extends its area every year. If the loss due to it could be computed it would doubtless prove to be heavy.

This mention of the Squirrel-tail has been made because of its similarity in habits to the Downy or Awned Brome Grass (*Bromus tectorum* L.) which this article discusses. Thirty years ago, the Squirrel-tail did not seem to promise as much as a weed pest as does the Downy Brome today. Both have been introduced from Eurasia; both are winter annuals; and both could be readily exterminated if cut early enough in the year to prevent the maturing of seeds.

The plant is of slender erect leafy growth, with softly pubescent leaves and open nodding panicles the spikelets of which are tipped with long silky awns. It grows from six inches to two feet high and while thriving in cinders, sand or other poor soil where it approximates its minimum size, it does well on good soil and makes a much larger plant.

The date and means of its introduction into the United States and into Iowa seem uncertain but do not appear to date back many decades. In Iowa it is most abundant along the railroad tracks and in only two or three cases have we failed to find it around elevators and stockyards.

The railroads have had much to do with its introduction and spreading. In some regions it grows in unbroken strips along miles of track. It is thus practically continuous along the Burlington tracks from Mount Pleasant to Fairfield, a distance of twenty-three miles.

There is, of course, the question as to whether or not this weed can establish itself in pastures and meadows as has the Squirrel-



Fig. 27. Downy Brome Grass, about one-third natural size.

tail. In a few places it has been observed running out into thickly sodded areas and apparently thriving in the face of the competition of blue grass and timothy. It matures its seed even earlier than Squirrel-tail, and the seeds are disseminated long before one thinks of cutting weeds. This early seeding which has made Squirrel-tail such an obnoxious weed permits the Downy Brome to extend its area unchecked.

As late as 1912 Doctor Pammel gave in the "Weed Flora of Iowa" only five counties in which it was known to exist. During the recent seasons we have been observing it and while in many cases the record has been neglected it has been identified and record made for the following towns within our state: Monroe, Pella, Keota, Washington, Glendale, Lockridge, Beckwith, Cantril, Donnellson, Mount Pleasant, Delta, Rose Hill, Oskaloosa,

Osceola, Allison, Belle Plaine, Center Junction, Oakville, Fairfield, Rockwell City, Sherwood, Yetter, Ells, Denison, Villisca, Corning, Afton Junction, Clark, Malvern, Council Bluffs, Minden, Neola, Avoca, Havelock, Harlan, Kirkman, Ames, Irwin, Botna, Manning, Glidden, Halbur, Carnarvon, Wall Lake, St. Charles, Fremont, Hedrick, What Cheer, Kirkville, New Sharon, Lacey, Bernhardt, County Line.

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