



RAYLESS CHAMOMILE

SO GUESS where I am while I'm writing this article? Nope. Nope. Nuhuh. Wait. Who said on a train from St Malo to Dusseldorf. Damn. I thought you'd never guess.

I am lucky enough to be spending three and a half weeks touring through Italy, France, Germany and the UK visiting universities and attending a conference, all part of keeping my skills and knowledge up-to-date. But it is also a great chance to find some new weeds and spot some favourites in a new setting.

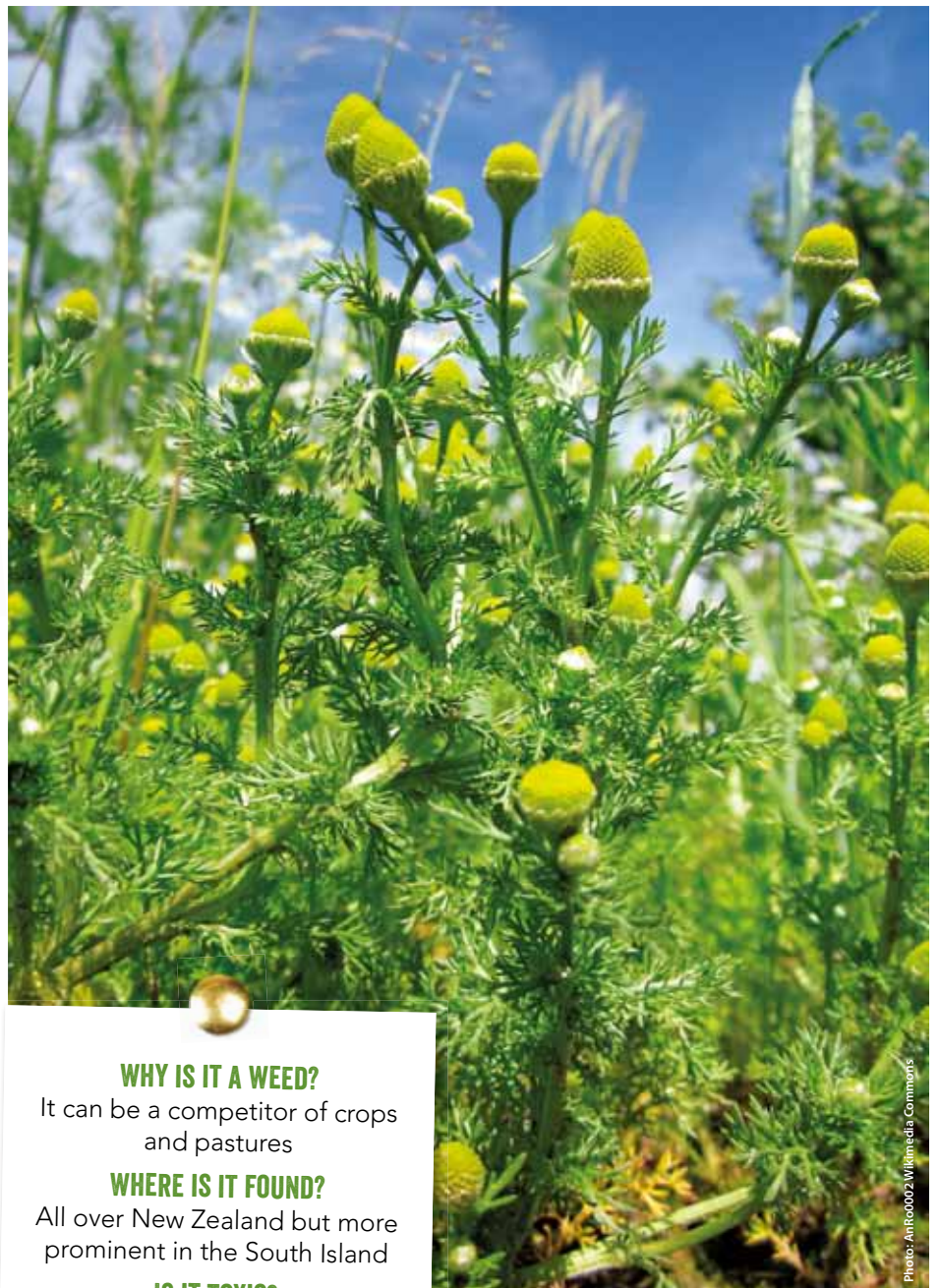
This column continues our series on the common mayweeds or chamomiles. This month it's rayless chamomile which has unfortunately eluded me on my travels so far, but I am certain you can all find it readily at home in New Zealand.

Rayless chamomile (*Matricaria discoidea*) is an annual weed found up and down the country. It's originally native to North America but has done an amazing job of spreading nearly everywhere: Europe, UK, Asia, New Zealand and Australia. In fact I am certain nearly everyone will have come across this weed at some point in time.

However you probably don't know it by the name rayless chamomile. How about pineapple weed? It's often called that on account of the smell it produces when crushed and most people I train refer to it this way.

Rayless chamomile is completely edible and can be used in salads if you pick the leaves before it flowers. Once it flowers, it turns very bitter.

It can be tricky to identify or really easy, depending on whether or not you can crush it. If you can crush it, it has that



WHY IS IT A WEED?

It can be a competitor of crops and pastures

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

All over New Zealand but more prominent in the South Island

IS IT TOXIC?

No

ALTERNATIVE USES?

It is edible and has been used in herbal medicines

distinctive pineapple smell that gives it away every time. If you can't crush it you have a rather more tricky identification. In its vegetative phase it looks very similar to the other mayweeds (stinking mayweed, annual mayweed). The plants germinate quickly in the spring and early summer, usually in areas with poor, compacted soils such as gateways, laneways, footpaths etc. It produces a long but gentle taproot with multiple stems coming from it and a plethora of small, fine, compound leaves, similar to a carrot.

Rayless chamomile grows to a height of around 15cm and then begins flowering. The flowers are a green-yellow colour but don't form petals (hence the term 'rayless').

These are shaped a little like a pine cone, with one source giving this as the reason why it is called pineapple weed (as pine cones were originally called 'pineapples').

HOW TO CONTROL IT

This is pretty easy. In a home garden it can simply be pulled from the soil as the root doesn't do a very good job of holding it in the ground.

In a crop or pasture most common herbicides have some activity but the trick is to spray early – once it's flowering it's bullet-proof.

Otherwise, just keep a good healthy canopy of pasture grasses as it is easily outcompeted. ■

MILTON MUNRO is a soil and plant scientist for rural supply company PGG Wrightson. He looks at common pasture weeds on blocks and how to deal with them.

