

Ventenata

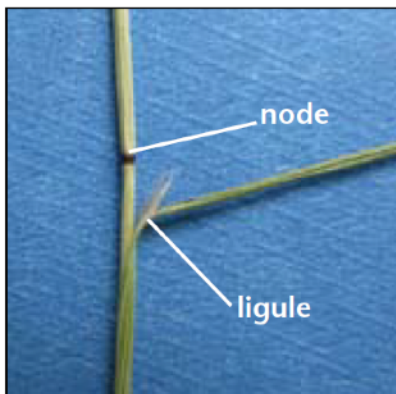
This past September, while helping the Joliet NRCS field office conduct a range inventory in Carbon County, we came across a grass that we were unfamiliar with. September can be somewhat of a difficult time of year to identify plants because usually grazing has already taken place so seed heads are hard to find (which are generally very useful in plant identification), and most cool season plants are cured out. Although this grass was cured out, it had not been grazed and there were plenty of specimens to choose from.

Ventenata dubia goes by several names, most common is simply Ventenata, wiregrass, or North Africa grass. It is a non-native annual from the Mediterranean region. This plant has been reported to out compete cheatgrass, which may sound like a good thing, however it spreads quickly, is difficult to control, and is degrading native range, transitional forest habitats, pastures, hay fields, and CRP all over the west. It has little to no forage value for livestock or wildlife due to its growth habits and high silica content, similar to medusahead. Ventenata is a fall germinator, seedlings generally emerging in October-mid November. It overwinters and produces a seed head the following spring, about a month after cheatgrass, usually in May and June. The shallow root system increases the potential for erosion, limits waterway function, can decrease wildlife habitat, especially for nesting birds, and significantly reduces yields of desirable grasses in range, pasturelands, and hay fields.

According to a paper from the Washington State University Extension (EB2038E), there are several characteristics to look for when identifying this grass:

Early Season (May–June)

- Plants are vibrant green.
- Nodes are dark red or black.
- Ligules are unusually long (1–8 mm).
- Roots are shallow.



To identify ventenata in the spring, look for a dark red or black node and long ligule.
(Pamela Scheinost, NRCS Pullman PMC)

Late Season (June–August)

- Plants are silvery-green, then turn tan.
- Stems are wiry with few leaves.
- Panicles are open.
- Awns are bent when dry.

Preliminary studies have shown a thick layer of litter increases Ventenata seedling emergence by 40-95 percent. Selective herbicides can be effective to control Ventenata, however care must be taken to follow label instructions to minimize damage to desirable grasses. Application of fertilizer may benefit perennial grasses in becoming more competitive and recover from herbicide damage quicker. Mowing during heading is not recommended, as plants will bend over and tough stems will

become tangled in mowing equipment (hence the name wiregrass). If mowing takes place prior to seed head emergence, be prepared for another flush of growth. Seeds appear to be viable for only 2-3 years, so with 3 or 4 years of aggressive management, it is possible to control and eradicate.

Maintaining healthy grasslands and practicing good grazing and forage management to keep desirable plants competitive are key in preventing Ventenata and other undesirable species from invading. Clean vehicles and equipment to stop transport of seed to new locations. Be vigilant and keep an eye out for new weedy species, such as Ventenada, that may show up unexpectedly, and do your part to prevent new infestations.



Inserted from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/plant_diversity/3735553444/in/album-72157688702653646/>

Photo credits: Matt Lavin, Montana State University.

Sources: *USDA NRCS Plant Guide, Ventenata, <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov> ; *Ventenata: A new non-native grass to fight, Amanda Gearhart & Tim Prather, <https://www.progressivecattle.com/topics/grazing/6250-ventenata-a-new-non-native-grass-to-fight> ; *Ventenata, Publication EB2038E, Washington State University Extension, <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/EB2038E/eb2038E.pdf> ;

*Ventenata, August 2013 Monthly Weed Post, MSU Extension, http://msuinvasiveplants.org/extension/monthly_weed_post.html

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