Stem nematode (*Ditylenchus dipsaci*)

**Description:** A minute parasitic eelworm (0.5 mm long). Nematodes need moist, cold conditions before attacking the plant and invading the shoot. The life cycle is completed in 20 days and the nematode can reproduce four or five times in a season. The nematodes dehydrate and can survive in soil, plant crowns, hay and seed for 10 years or more.

Nematodes feed on the emerging shoot, crown and above ground parts of the plant, resulting in distorted, extra tillers or stems and stunted growth. Leaves have reduced leaf area either side of the midrib. The crown is very compact, giving a swollen appearance.

**Damage:** High nematode numbers can lead to poor crop emergence. The disease appears in patches, but can affect whole crops. Seedlings are very intolerant, but plants become more resistant with maturity. Final yield losses have generally been minimal.

**Monitoring:** The nematode is spreading through cereal growing districts in South Australia, mainly in infected oaten hay and seed (especially faba beans).

**Management:** Crop rotation remains the most effective means of control. Do not sow canola within two years of growing susceptible oats. Refer to the latest information on resistant and susceptible crops and varieties.

**Images:** S Taylor, SARDI

Stem nematode (*Ditylenchus dipsaci*) disease on canola plant.