

CONSERVING OUR NATIVE GRASSLANDS & WOODLAND GROUND FLORA – THE NEED FOR WEED ACTION

Rod Bird, SEANA Oct 2009

PROBLEM

Unless we take action now, weeds will ultimately destroy most of our roadsides and other small areas of native grasslands. There seems to be little evidence that DSE, Shires or other bodies are taking effective action to save the best of our reserves. Naturalists need to ensure that environmental weeds do not become entrenched in their reserves. When you see an emerging problem take action to stamp it out.

The problem is self-evident when you see *Sparaxis bulbifera* (Harlequin Flower), *Oxalis purpurea* (Purple Oxalis), *Watsonia meriana* (Watsonia), *Alium triquetrum* (Angled Onion), *Moraea flaccida* (Cape Tulip), *Asparagus asparagoides* (Bridal Creeper), *Vinca major* (Blue Periwinkle), *Ulex europaeus* (Gorse), *Juncus acutus* (Spiny Rush), Phalaris, Gazania (a new threat) and a host of other environmental weeds spreading along our road and railway verges and into the few remaining Bushland, Streamside, Scenic or Flora Reserves that are worth saving in our sea of agriculture.

Small bushland areas are very vulnerable because of the relatively large area of edges with agriculture, tracks and firebreaks – and the fact that people dump garden refuse in these unmanaged reserves. “New” weed infestations must be attacked early to achieve eradication.

ACTION

The aim of the following approaches is as follows”

- Destroy the aliens but minimise damage to adjacent natives
- For bulbous species, work outward from least affected parts of the area
- For clumps of Phalaris & Cocksfoot, etc, control the periphery as well as isolated plants
- The ultimate aim is to achieve re-colonisation from the adjacent natives.

Hand-weeding/digging – this is possible for small infestations but it is not 100% effective for bulbous species such as African Weed Orchid, Cape Tulip or others of the Iris family.

Spot-spraying – this minimises damage to adjacent native species. Select the correct herbicide (*Metsulfuron methyl*, as “Brushoff”, “Ally”, “Aim”, etc) is safe to use (a very low toxicity to mammals) and is effective on woody vegetation, bulbous species and others such as *Vinca major* (Blue Periwinkle). Take note - it will kill most broad-leaved woody natives, too!

- *Metsulfuron methyl* (e.g Ally) can be used where the bulbous aliens (Sparaxis, Angled Onion, African Weed Orchid, Freesia, etc) have invaded native grasses – the herbicide does not appear to kill the grasses (but will kill many other natives including native lilies).
- Always add a wetter to the spray – the herbicide will often be ineffective without a detergent, such as “Pulse”.
- For Ally, use about 2 g (2 x ¼ teaspoon measure) with 50 mL Pulse and a dye (40 mL) per 10 L water to help you when spraying. This herbicide loses activity after one day, so mix only what you need and do not store the spray solution for later use. (This granular herbicide is only available in 500 g packs so clubs could buy a pack and provide members with small quantities to use)
- Use a selective grass herbicide (other than Glyphosate) where native lilies are very prevalent and can not be avoided
- For severe grass problems (Phalaris, Cocksfoot, etc), choose a season to spray when native lilies and orchids have not shown leaves
- A small, inexpensive household sprayer that holds about 1 litre is ideal for isolated plants – carry it in the car, along with water, herbicide and wetter in separate small containers.

Wiping – this is very effective (with less damage to non-target species) for plants such as Cape Tulip or Wild Gladiolus that have strap-like leaves that are difficult to wet with a spray.

- Use at least 3 times the concentration of herbicide used normally (a very small volume will actually be applied, so do not mix up too much). Carry the prepared mixture in a screw-top container with an opening wide enough to admit the tongs applicator.
- The tool - modify bar-b-q tongs (or similar appliance) by adding a foam pad to each claw.