SOUTH AFRICAN DEVOURS SOUTH AFRICAN

Bridal creeper is a highly invasive weed with the potential to become rampant throughout the south of Western Australia, and make a disastrous impact on WA's natural ecosystems. Already classed by the National Weed Strategy as a Weed of National Significance, it has been rated as a high priority for action in CALM's Environmental Weed Strategy for WA since 1999.

Bridal creeper *(Asparagus asparagoides)*, a relative of the familiar asparagus vegetable, is one of southern Australia's worst environmental weeds and is prevalent in many WA bushlands and waterways. It is a perennial climber from South Africa that smothers existing vegetation. Its extensive and impenetrable tuber matt competes with native plants for nutrients, and prevents the germination of native seedlings. Bridal creeper is difficult to control with herbicides, as the tuber matt has many growing points requiring repeated applications of herbicide to kill it. Also, the herbicide may contact surrounding vegetation.

So what is the answer? Perhaps biological control, using natural enemies from the weed's country of origin would be a more sustainable method of controlling bridal creeper.

In 1999, the CSIRO and the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Weed Management Systems, with support from CALM, released the bridal creeper leafhopper, an insect from South Africa that attacks the plant. Several releases of the leafhopper have been made, and it has demonstrated its ability to rapidly defoliate bridal creeper, with early results showing great promise. While demand for the insect Australia-wide is greater than available stocks, there is a way a local school or community group may be able to help. The leafhopper is easy to rear in a classroom or home environment, and can then be released at local infestations.

To help people get involved in rearing their own leafhoppers, the CSIRO and the CRC Weed Management Systems have developed a website that contains all the information needed to start a rearing project. Already, several WA schools have taken part in the project, and the website can help schools in other States to become involved. The reader can find the website at: http://www.ento.csiro.au/research/weedmgmt/bridal_creeper/

The breeding of bridal creeper leafhopper in schools is educational, fun and an excellent way of involving young Western Australians in the protection of our natural environment from this potentially disastrous weed.

Readers interested in learning about and/or helping to eradicate the bridal creeper weed can also contact their local CALM district office for advice on where to find bridal creeper plants, and where best to release the leafhopper offspring.

Left: CSIRO Research Officer Kathryn Batchelor examines a leafhopper, one of many raised by Swanbourne Primary School students.
Photo – Peter Maloney

Below: Adult bridal creeper leafhopper.
Photo – Mike Keller

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting

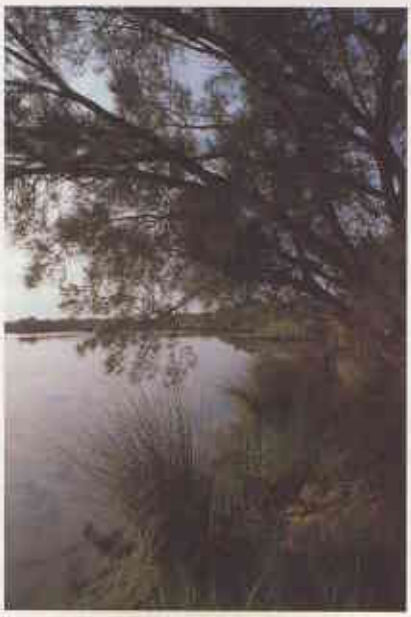
LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SIXTEEN, NUMBER 4, WINTER 2001

Western Australian botanists are taking part in a global plan to store seed from 10 per cent of the world's flora by 2010. See page 23.

Mushrooms the size of a dinner plate can appear within 48 hours of a fire in the karri forest. Read about forest fungi on page 48.

The Pilbara's numerous islands are rich in history, wildflowers and wildlife, with prolific marine life in the surrounding waters. See page 34.



Discover the rich bird life and tranquillity of the Canning River Regional Park on page 17.

Many of WA's threatened marsupials can be seen in the south-west for the first time in decades. Read about their return to Dryandra Forest on page 10.

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

Paradoxically, the stinging tentacles of sea anemones—a group of carnivorous invertebrates that sometimes resemble colourful flowers—can also provide a safe haven for many underwater creatures. Anemonefish gain immunity to the stinging cells and live primarily in sea anemone tentacles. Other animals, such as crabs, carry a protective anemone on their backs. Turn to page 28.

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Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital
Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print

Please do not send unsolicited material to *LANDSCOPE*, but feel free to telephone the editors.

Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net

Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia

DEPARTMENT OF Conservation AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Conserving the nature of WA