

urban antics

by John Hunter

Multicultural biodiversity

In about 450 BC, the Athenian poet Sophocles wrote:

"Numberless are the world's wonders, but none More wonderful than man; the stormgrey sea Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high; Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven With shining furrows where his plows have gone...The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover, The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water, All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind..."

Some 2,500 years later, eminent naturalist Rachel Carson wrote:

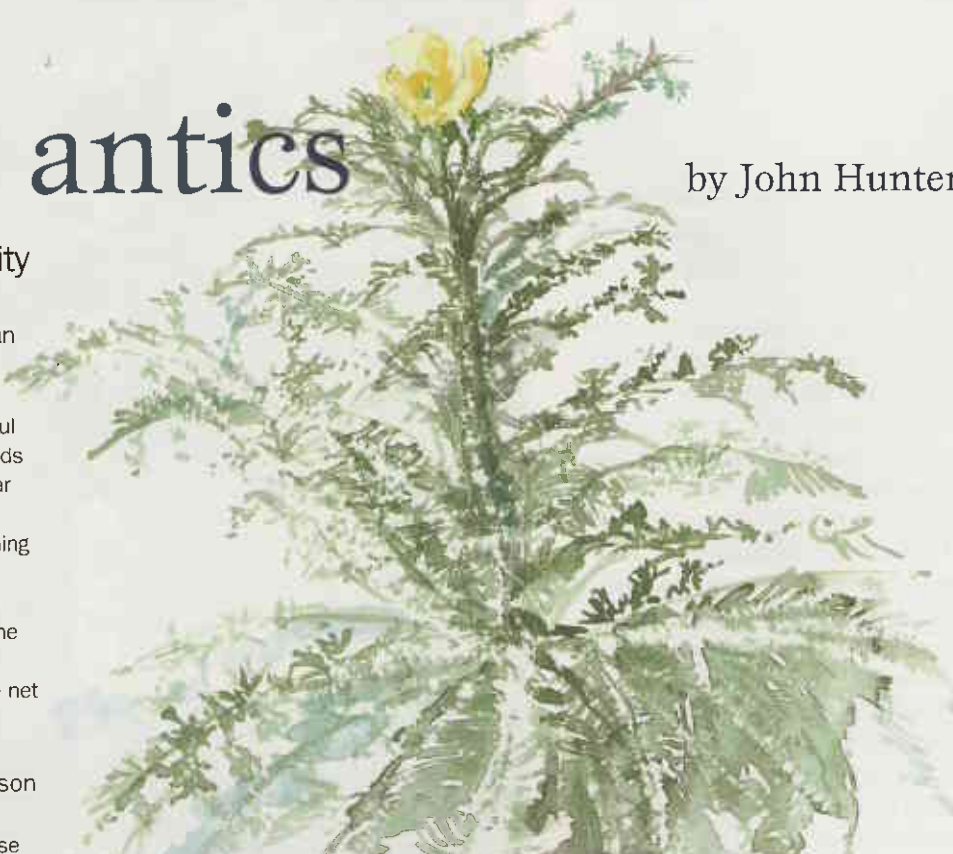
"The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of Man."

You might be thinking, thank goodness we've finally got it right. We now realise the Earth is not an inexhaustible resource and that species and habitats shouldn't be wasted by human apathy or mismanagement. A present concern is the creeping menace of weeds.

At this time of the year, particularly in and around our urban areas, there are growing indicators of possible displacement and replacement of unique, native plants and animals.

The lush greens we see down by the back fence, along verges and lanes, Shire parks, home gardens, spare blocks and general bushland are mostly exotic (foreign or introduced) weeds, weeds and more weeds. While a few are misplaced native or garden plants, all have been transported, either deliberately or accidentally. They are now on the march throughout most of the State.

A weed is simply a plant that is growing where it is not wanted. It follows that all introduced plants established outside of cultivated areas are weeds.



In waterways, and over and under shrubs, like an insidious cancer, exotic weeds are becoming the norm. The awful reality is that most of us do not realise or recognise the intruders as exotic. And, I dare say, many of us do not seem to care.

Weeds are extremely successful in urban areas as they respond positively and rapidly to land disturbance, such as building and road developments. Seeds of grasses and thistles are easily carried by the wind, transported on vehicles, dumped in garden waste and distributed in the droppings of birds. Unfortunately, weeds are gradually spreading out into the bush and there is a serious chance that the Australian environment may change forever. For example, not only can a diverse understorey of

native flowering plants be replaced by exotic grasses, but without them, the local nectar-dependent jewel beetles, honeyeaters and tiny marsupial possums cannot survive and may disappear.

The yellow dandelion-like carpets of African capeweed in spring have been with us for so long they are generally accepted as locals. In truth, they could easily inundate and threaten the beautiful multi-coloured swathes of native everlastings.

The book *Western Weeds* is as spectacular in its floral photography as it is informative. It's an absolute eye-opener for those who think they know what grows around them, as it is for those who don't. It will help you to help us maintain our State's wildlife integrity.

DID YOU KNOW?

The book *Western Weeds* is produced by the Plant Protection Society of WA and is available from the Department of Agriculture phone (08) 9368 3710 or email (enquiries@agic.wa.gov.au).

There are about 10,000 named species of flowering plants growing wild in Western Australia, of which about 90 per cent are natives. About 1,000 species have been introduced.

Plant migrants come mostly from Europe or South Africa, with an increasing number coming from the Americas and eastern Australia.

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