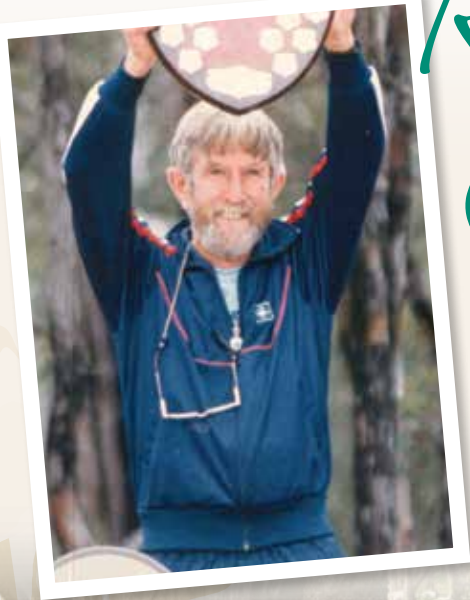


Touched by nature

Roy and the arum lilies



Roy Hiller (1924-2009) was an environmental warrior whose dedicated efforts led to the eradication of arum lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*) from Wadjemup or Rottneest Island. His efforts protected the island's environment from this weed and saved massive control expenditure if it had become widely established.

by Elizabeth Rippey and Jon Dodd



During the 1990s, an infestation of arum lilies (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*) on Wadjemup, or Rottnest Island, was spreading around Garden Lake into the adjacent heath and the settlement.

In 1992, Roy Hiller joined the Rottnest Voluntary Guides Association (RVGA) and was an active member for some 15 years. Roy first became aware of the spread of weedy arum lily when he

attended a talk for the Rottnest Guides about the vegetation of the islands off the coast of Perth.

He then committed himself to spending the next four years of his life getting rid of the arums on Wadjemup. His wife Jo Hiller OAM said recently that he became “savagely devoted to removing them because they were seeding themselves so rapidly.”

DANGEROUS BEAUTY

Arum lily is a spectacularly beautiful South African wildflower, long prized as a garden plant but now a Declared Pest in the south-west of Western Australia.

It is poisonous to livestock and humans and is sometimes called ‘death lily’ or ‘funeral flower’ as it was traditionally used at funerals. It also invades native vegetation, outcompeting pastures in wetter areas of the south-west. A large perennial, it is spread by birds attracted to its fleshy red fruits and persists by means of its underground rhizomes.

Surprisingly, arum lily flourishes on the larger Perth offshore islands where there is virtually no surface fresh water. It was



first recorded on Wadjemup, or Rottnest Island, in 1959, on Carnac Island in 1975 and on Garden Island in 1978.

GETTING STUCK IN

Roy tackled the problem on the island simply by digging the arums out. He wrote: “It sounds easy, but...! Around the fig trees one has to saw off many branches and roots to get at the plants, and remove

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- Previous page*
 - Main** Invasive arum lily.
 - Photo – Nature Conservation Margaret River*
 - Below** Aerial view of Rottnest Island.
 - Photo – Garry Norris Photography*
 - Inset** Roy Hiller.
 - Photo – The Hiller family*
 - Above right** Arum lily infestation, Garden Island.
 - Photo – Elizabeth Rippey*
 - Below** Rottnest Island.
 - Photo – Panther Media Gmb/Alamy*





“After four dedicated years, Rottnest Island was largely free of arum lilies and remains so today.”

a century’s worth of junk...Among the reeds one has either to wade or wait for the summer drought...Then one has to dig to remove all the rhizomes—sausage-like objects, which range in length from 5-200 millimetres and in number up to perhaps 30 per plant. One is unlikely to get them all at one hit. So, they grow again. Some areas have already been dug over six times.”

He went over to Rottnest Island every week during the arum growing season, armed with a trowel, mattock, saw and secateurs to dig out any he encountered, then leaving the bagged plants in the ranger’s office for disposal.

Roy initially targeted what was then thought to be the island’s sole infestation, restricted to the area around Garden Lake and the settlement. However, he soon found several more populations, scattered around both lighthouses, the nursery,

Above Flowering arum lily.
Photo – Jon Dodd

Above right Areas around Rottnest’s salt lakes are prone to arum infestation.
Photo – Adobe stock

Right Roy received the CEO Award for his work on Rottnest Island.
Photo – The Hiller family

the airstrip, and an old army camp beside Oliver Hill where arum had probably been spread recently as seeds by fruit-eating birds, especially silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*).

After four dedicated years, Rottnest Island was largely free of arum lilies and remains so today. Staff still continue to monitor for arum lily and treat it accordingly—a task made so much easier thanks to Roy’s amazing efforts.

MAKING IT WORK

Roy had a rare combination of attributes that enabled him to achieve his goal of controlling Rottnest Island’s arum lily infestation. Four major aspects of Roy’s life showed that, firstly, he had great courage and commitment; secondly, he was a fine administrator and organiser; thirdly, he could expertly survey and interpret the landscape; and, fourthly, he was fit enough to cross Rottnest’s hilly terrain on foot or by bike to search for and remove this weed. And he was also utterly delightful, with the magnanimity and determination to pursue arum lily relentlessly for four years.

In addition to guiding on Wadjemup and orienteering, Roy’s other environmental interests included carrying out repairs on the Bibbulmun Track, organising volunteers for the annual Clean Up Australia campaigns, and being a regular rogaining competitor.

“He was an absolutely gorgeous man,” Jo Hiller said. “He was an exciting father to our two girls, and we had a fantastically happy time always.”

In 2000, Roy won the Rottnest Island Authority CEO’s Award in recognition of his environmental work. Roy’s lasting legacy is Rottnest’s relief from this major environmental weed and showing just how much one retired volunteer can achieve!



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