

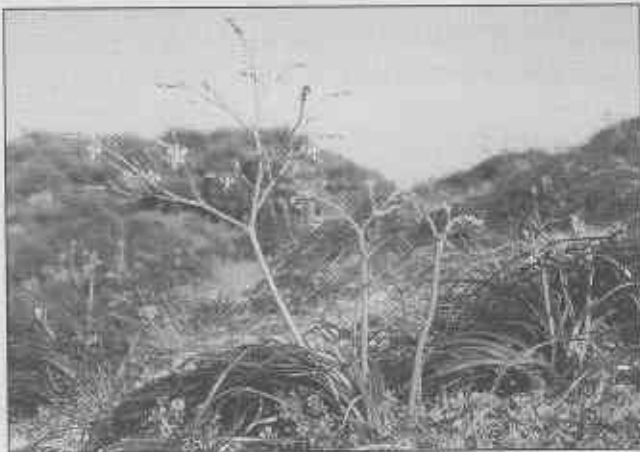
WEED ALERT

DUNE ONION WEED KILLS HORSES

EVERY year horses paddocked on the coastal plain north and south of Perth die from eating Dune Onion Weed, *Trachyandra divaricata*. In bush or paddock, this is definitely one to eradicate.

Dune Onion Weed is a South African species with dense clumps of flattened leaves, widely branching flower stalks and small white flowers often with yellow spots near their base. It occurs throughout the lower southwest from Geraldton to Albany, especially close to the coast on calcareous sandy soils. (A similar plant from the Mediterranean, Onion Weed, *Asphodelus fistulosus*, has less branched stalks and flowers with a brown stripe in the centre. It is very widespread from Exmouth to Eucla and is rapidly invading arid pastoral areas. It is not known to be toxic.) Neither plant actually smells of onions.

Both plants are invasive weeds, spreading rapidly by seed. In bushland they outcompete local species, especially in immediate post-fire regeneration. In overgrazed sandy paddocks they can come to dominate



Dune Onion Weed, *Trachyandra divaricata*



Onion Weed, *Asphodelus fistulosus*

the ground layer. In summer, if there is no other feed for the animals so that they are forced to graze the *Trachyandra*, it can be fatal. It is toxic to all stock, but horses are thought to be the most susceptible. It is not known whether native species, such as roos or tammars, eat it, but if they do, it probably has a similar effect.

AGWEST Veterinary Toxicologist Jeremy Allen says: "Affected animals show a stiff, stumbling, uncoordinated gait, with tremors and excessive sweating. This progresses to partial paralysis affecting muscular ability but not sensation, and the animal goes down onto the sternum. Death eventually occurs from starvation, dehydration or complications resulting from the paralysis. It may take from 1-3 months from the first signs to sternal recumbency.

"If the condition is detected very early then it can be reversed by removing access to the plant. However, in most cases it is noticed too late. When this happens you either get only partial recovery - with a horse this could be dangerous - or the disease just progresses to the terminal stages. The equine vets at Murdoch have a lot of experience with this disease and can quickly tell if it has progressed too far for an animal to recover."

The best cure is prevention!

- (1) Remove all *Trachyandra* from your property. Spot spraying with Ally/Brushoff in summer/autumn at 5gm/ha for 2 years gives 100% control.
- (2) Ensure that your stock have plenty to eat so that they are not forced to graze *Trachyandra*.

Penny Hussey

INCREASED FUNDING FOR WEED MANAGEMENT

The Federal Government recently announced funding for a Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management, which will continue the good work of the current CRC for Weed Management Systems through to 2008. The CRCAWM will be working to reduce the risks to the environment, agriculture and rural sectors all across Australia, from currently established weed species as well as increasing numbers of newly invading weeds.

CRCAWM is designed to attack the challenge in three ways:

- 1 Reduce the influx of new weeds and more effectively manage weed incursions already established in the country.
- 2 Devise innovative methods and strategies to integrate weed management that reduces costs and improves agricultural sustainability.
- 3 Protect the integrity of Australia's landscapes and natural ecosystems through the use of multi-disciplinary approaches.

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