

MEMBERS' PAGE

WEEDY SUCCESS STORY!

Julia Boniface



2001, before rust infection



2004, two years after infection. Note dead and dying stems.

WE are probably all familiar with the devastation caused by a rampant infestation of Bridal Creeper. Understorey species are rapidly smothered until the Bridal Creeper dominates. *LFW* members Shaun Cook and Denise Canna became only too aware of this after they bought their property on the Blackwood River about 30 km from Nannup. They had a huge Bridal Creeper problem on their river foreshore, which also extended to adjacent properties and State Forest. "We were devastated by the amount of Bridal Creeper and just didn't know what to do about it," remembers Denise. "We couldn't see the river because of the height of the infestation". Even grazing with sheep was considered seriously as an option.

So it was with cautious optimism that the rust fungus, the biocontrol agent for Bridal Creeper developed by the CSIRO, was welcomed. In the winters of 2002 and 2003 the rust was released on Sean and Denise's property. Rust fungus was also released in 2002 on the property on the other side of the river. It was with great excitement that Denise recently shared the news that the rust was winning a seemingly impossible battle. The columns of green swathing the trees and understorey were gone and replaced with a sick-looking yellowish-brown tangle. "We're really delighted" said Denise. "We never expected anything like this – we can even see the river!"

Some regrowth of the weed next autumn and winter is expected, but the rust, having spent the summer as spores on the dead Bridal Creeper stalks, will be there to resume the offensive.

The long term outcome for an infestation such as this is as yet unknown, as the rust has only been around for a

few years. Will the apparent eradication be permanent? Or will the rust do too good a job, deprive itself of its food source and therefore not be there to tackle any future outbreaks? Only time will tell.

One thing we have to be vigilant for is the creation of opportunity for other more difficult weeds, which can invade the empty space left by the Bridal Creeper before natural regeneration has the chance to occur. This has already been observed with several species including the Dolichos Pea. Careful observation of the regeneration site is important and replanting with local native plants may be necessary.

Despite this cautious note, Bridal Creeper rust is one of the big biocontrol success stories and hopefully Sean and Denise's experience will inspire other landowners to give it a go.

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Did you know?

that weeds cost farmers 14% of their income? A new report confirms that weeds are causing a loss of \$1 in every \$7 of agricultural income.

'The Economic Impact of Weeds in Australia' Sinden et al. 2003. To obtain a copy, email request to: weedsrsc.publications@adelaide.edu.au