

MEMBER'S PAGE

Eliminating Bridal Creeper - spreading the rust

Avril Baxter

BRIDAL CREEPER (*Asparagus asparagoides*), an import from South Africa, is a declared Weed of National Significance in Australia. It is spread around the countryside by birds who eat its bright red berries. The germinating plant quickly establishes an underground tuber that keeps it alive over our hot dry summers. It is difficult to control with herbicides or hand weeding.

During 2001-2004, CSIRO with the help of the community, released a rust fungus at over 1150 sites across Australia. The rust fungus (*Puccinia myrsiphylli*) only lives on bridal creeper and not on other closely related native or economic plants. In most release sites it is becoming established and killing pockets of bridal creeper and good populations are now established in many areas. However it was noted that around Narrogin, Williams and West Arthur it was slow to spread and more help was needed. So at the suggestion of CSIRO, the Department of Agriculture, Land for Wildlife and the Community Support Officers in the area held two "Spreading the Rust Days".

Here, keen locals with their eye on bridal creeper infestations came along to two of the original release sites, collected infected material and transferred it to their site on the same day. In a couple of years, when the rust has become established in these areas, it can again be transferred to other sites.

One site visited was *Land for Wildlife* member Jodie and Leanne White's property (See WW 2/4 Bridal Creeper - Everybody's Problem). Starting in 1998, a major chemical weed control program had been undertaken by Green Corps for two years in a row which was followed up annually by the landowners. Although a dent had been made in the population it required intervention every year to keep on top of it.

The Whites welcomed their local Community Landcare Co-ordinator's suggestion to release rust fungus



Land for Wildlife members harvesting rust-infected bridal creeper material to transfer to other sites. Photo: A. Baxter

to the site in 2002 and are pleased with the results so far. The rust is killing bridal creeper where it has been released and is slowly spreading, they feel that it is more of a longterm solution for them to spread the rust fungus within the site than to keep on spraying.

The locations of all release sites are held on a database by CSIRO. To find the site nearest you contact Kathryn Batchelor at CSIRO on 9333 6643 or visit their website on www.ento.csiro.au/bridalcreeper

WEED ALERT

Horehound

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) is a really bad weed in the Goldfields region. Originally from the eastern Mediterranean, it is a spreading bushy plant covered with grey cottony hairs, has globular clusters of small white flowers in the leaf axils and a strong minty smell. The calyx is hooked and can contaminate wool. It likes to grow in disturbed open areas such as heavily-grazed pastoral paddocks, and is now so widespread on some Goldfields pastoral leases that it is almost uneconomical to undertake chemical control.

A biological control agent which is specific to horehound, the plume moth, is being tried. Its larvae feed on the growing tips of the plant, and work their way down the shoot while progressively defoliating the stem. The first time an introduction was tried, the plume moths were sourced from a high rainfall area of Victoria, and they did not survive in the arid Goldfields. This time moths from Murray Bridge in South Australia are being used, and hopefully they will cope better with the Goldfields climate.

Feral 'natives'

Last year Parks Victoria spent \$95,000 in Arthur's Seat State Park in trying to control an invader from Western Australia, Austral Bluebell, *Sollya heterophylla*, which had escaped from gardens.

Introductions from other States are not 'native' plants - beware of them! Noted author and weed campaigner Tim Low says: "One plant with time on its hands is Mat Rush, *Lomandra longifolia*, a domineering species in eastern Australia that is now sold in nurseries in Perth and sprouting prolifically in gardens there". Sold to satisfy the current fad for 'grass-like' plants in landscaping, I can personally verify its aggressiveness! And while we are considering garden plants that spread easily, watch out for *Dietes iridoides* sprouting in bushland close to ornamental roadside or parkland plantings.

Penny Hussey