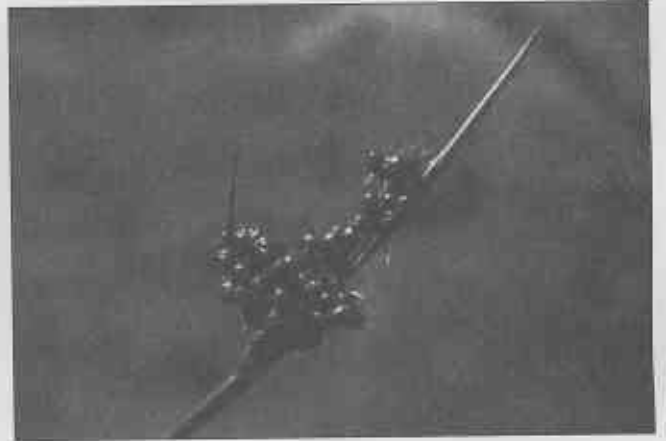
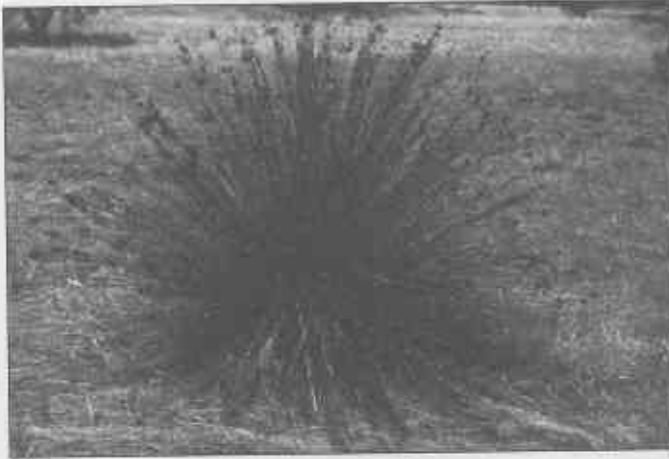


WEEDS

SHARP RUSH

Do you know this pest? It is widespread across the northern and western part of the Wheatbelt, and is spreading fast. The tips of the stems are quite spiny. If you are sure you have seen it, please let your LFWO know where, so that a clear idea of its present distribution can be recorded.



Left: plant. Right: fruiting head, note sharp spines.

Sharp (or Spiny) Rush, *Juncus acutus*, is widespread around the Mediterranean, growing on mainly coastal salt marshes. You will see it in southern France, for example on the Camargue, along with grey horses, black bulls, pink flamingoes and Sea Daffodils. Somehow it got to WA, perhaps as seeds in the soil in plant pots, where it has found our saline soils very much to its liking. It is now widespread on the western side of the Avon Catchment and as far north as Three Springs, as well as in areas of the Coastal Plain.

The rushes are a worldwide group of mainly tufted perennial plants, principally found in wet areas. The stems and leaves grow from a rhizome, are usually cylindrical and may contain pith. They have small green or brown flowers and are wind pollinated. As well as growing from seeds, they can also spread by rhizomes. It is often hard to tell the different species apart, but Sharp Rush is so called because the tips of the stems and leaves are quite stiff and sharp.

In past eras, rushes were important in Europe for a number of

reasons. Vast quantities were used to strew on the floor, where they formed a sort of absorbent packing that soaked up spilt liquids and trapped food scraps and other unpleasant refuse. The whole mess was swept up periodically and thrown out. (It is unlikely that *J. acutus* was used for rush matting, as the stems end in a sharp point, which might harm the paws of the Lords' hounds.) Another use comes from the fact that the outside of individual stems can be peeled away to leave the pith, which, after drying, can be used as a wick in primitive oil lamps. (The only record I can find of rushes being used in Australia is that Tasmanian Aboriginal people used the pith of the native Pale Rush, *J. pallidus*, to make head-dresses!)

Why is it a problem?

Sharp Rush is very vigorous and invasive. It can quickly come to dominate low-lying areas, especially paddock or bushland areas experiencing secondary salinity. It excludes other more useful species, both native plants and pasture. The dense clumps do not provide good habitat for small

animals such as quendas, frogs or lizards and, in common with many introduced plants, it does not harbour many invertebrates. The sharp spines can poke the eyes out of any unwary animal grazing too close. Thus areas dominated by Sharp Rush have reduced value for either grazing or biodiversity.

At the moment it is principally confined to disturbed areas in the agricultural area, but the real threat to biodiversity would occur if it gets into the fringing reedbeds around the coastal estuaries and wetlands. It would have the potential to change the character of these areas, making them far less valuable for wetland birds, for example. This is a very serious threat to biodiversity.

Control

Sharp Rush can be killed by herbicide (especially if a penetrant is added) but then the dead spiny tussocks remain to interfere with regeneration. If possible, fire or slashing could be used to remove the tussocks before using herbicide on the regeneration and the seedling growth that the fire will promote.

In paddock areas it is probably best to use fire followed by herbicide to totally remove all vegetation in the area, following up with cultivation and establishment of suitable perennial pasture species.

In bushland, spot spray with 20ml glyphosate 360 to 1 litre of water, plus the addition of a penetrant (eg Pulse) at 2ml/L of water. If spraying near open water, use a special formulation such as Roundup Biactive®. Monitor the area on a regular basis, and follow-up spray as required. Replant with suitable species to prevent other weeds filling the gaps.

This article is based on information presented at the

'Managing Sharp Rush Workshop' held in Perth on the 4th August 2006. Thanks to all speakers for sharing their knowledge. For more information on controlling Sharp Rush in bushland, contact Kate Brown at DEC's 'Urban Nature' by email: Urban.Nature@dec.wa.gov.au

Penny Hussey

Sharp Rush Brochure

Urban Nature and the Environmental Weeds Action Network have produced a brochure on controlling Sharp Rush in bushland. For a copy, contact Urban Nature.