

LOOKING FOR ERICA

Dorothy Redreau

After Alex George read about Spanish Heath in *Western Wildlife* 17/3, he wrote to the Editor to say “Further, re the article on *Erica lusitanica* near Denmark, there’s another species naturalised at Shannon. *Erica* expert Ted Oliver from South Africa identified it as *E. bacchans* and there’s no record at the Herbarium.”

Dorothy Redreau (LFWO) and Diane Harwood (local weed expert) undertook a quest to find the population and possibly another on Muir Highway and to collect specimens for the Herbarium. Further instructions from Alex helped pinpoint the location and Jackie Manning provided the coordinates for the Muir Highway population. At Shannon the results were spectacular, with a well-established population found, however we weren’t so lucky with the Muir Highway collection, not realising that it was probably some way into the forest south of the highway.

The Shannon population is on the site of a mill town which closed in 1968; other garden remnants include fruit trees, eastern states wattles, broom, and a pine plantation. The *Erica* has spread but has not yet moved very far, though it is quite dense downslope from what appears to be the original population.

Since the area is so degraded, one option is to leave it and monitor closely. However this course of action will give the plant even more chance to naturalise and it is already doing very well with lots of seedlings that flower in the first year and all ages looking very healthy. In the event of any earth works to the area or other disturbance such as fire, this will need very careful management.

Another concern is that this plant looks so like a native that it may be mistaken by visitors for a wildflower and be inadvertently spread by enthusiasts.

Diane advises that:

Managing an isolated outbreak of a suspected or known serious environmental weed is a step-by-step process.

- First find the vesting of the land concerned and map the outbreak. Advise the land manager if necessary.
- Consider markers to determine spread over time.
- Confirm the identification of the plant.
- Consider the history of the site.
- Determine when the weed was first sighted and how it might have been bought in.
- Document the condition of the surrounding vegetation.
- Consider the likely future use of the area, as earth works or fire may impact on management plans. The



Within Shannon townsite, Diane Harwood surveys the population that forms the shrub layer beneath the trees. It is dense, contains many seedlings and, as can be seen from the photograph below, is a rather beautiful plant. Photos: Dorothy Redreau.



imperative is not to encourage or allow the plant to spread.

- Care should be taken if removing plants to prevent spilling seed.
- In case of fire, take advantage of the rapid germination typical of weeds to target them as soon as they germinate.
- If ‘leave and monitor’ is the chosen action, then have some system in place for when the unexpected happens such as fire, beautification, change of land use etc.

As this article is being written, plans are being drawn up for work on the site. This information has proven to be timely and will be used to inform the planning process.