

Welcome to our second Newsletter. We hope you can make it to the events listed on our calendar, so that we can keep building our new Landcare community. Happy reading!

To weed or not to weed?

By Jim Sansom, Chair, NDLG. (Quotes used in this article are for narrative effect and are not necessarily the verbatim sentences used by our speakers.)

More than sixty people attended the Woodend Community Centre to hear three guest speakers and to take part in the discussion as well as the afternoon tea and chat which followed

Tim Sansom, horticultural scientist, currently working for the Diggers Club at St Erth, began his talk by suggesting a definition of weeds as plants which in some way have a negative impact on our livelihood or reduce habitat and bio-diversity. "It is not possible to turn back the clock and attempt to re-establish pre-European vegetation and regard all introduced species as weeds", Tim claimed. The ecological significance and the role a plant plays in the **present** environment is the important thing, irrespective of its origin. Many imported plants have, and will, become 'naturalised Australians', making a valuable contribution, both financially and in terms of habitat quality.

Whilst acknowledging the very real threat posed by such plants as willows and gorse, Tim cited instances where, kept under control, these plants might serve a useful function.

"It is impossible to eradicate them, so our weed management strategies must take account of the ecological benefits of plants. We must determine the best use of the resources available for weed management by being clear about our goals," Tim concluded.

Angela Gladman, who has spent recent years working in the riverine environment of the North Central Catchment, started her talk by asking "What is a healthy river?" and "What contribution do willows make to the health of a stream?"

Angela went on to explain that the nutrient drop from willows does not match the food requirements of native aquatic life; that willow roots have a damaging effect on stream channels by trapping sediments, altering channels and smothering other plants; that old willows do not develop hollows in their trunks to accommodate native fauna, and the water up-take of willows contributes to diminished stream flows; and of course the raging capacity of willows to spread is a serious threat to the land.

Tim conceded all of this: "Yes, if scientific evaluation confirms this, resources should be apportioned to deal with the problem of willows as part of a well founded over-all weed management strategy. The same applies to gorse or any other weed species."

Our third speaker, **Lachlan Milne**, environment resources officer for the Macedon Ranges, was less accommodating of weeds. "Can we afford to wait for a full scientific analysis before decisive action?" Lachlan asked. "Tim appears to accept a given level of resourcing but is this sufficient? I agree that we must have rational policies, but there is a place for subjectivity – there is scope for an emotional response to this issue. Our landscape has a cultural component, and there is a sense in which our local identity is affirmed by our landscape; we must **work** to maintain complexity and ecological diversity in a context of great pressure from development." Lachlan went on to question whether it was necessary to have weeds to provide habitat. "There is no room for complacency," he urged. "If the task needs more resources we must work hard to get those resources!"

So this is Lachlan's challenge. He reminded us that the Port Phillip and Westernport region generates some billions of dollars in wealth yet the one hundred and twenty or so volunteer groups working to sustain the ecological health of the region receive an average of about \$700 each per annum. Lachlan is too much of a gentleman to say it, but I think that this is **pathetic** and it

is up to groups such as the Newham and District Landcare Group to use all means available to lobby for the funding to get on top of the weed problem.

A lively open discussion followed, demonstrating the interest, knowledge and commitment of the people attending. Some valuable contributions were made about biological control of gorse (red spider mite) and modifications to accepted methods of spraying.

So the forum, **To weed or not to weed**, has been a success in that it has caused people to talk about the problem. Now for some ACTION!

Landholders in the Newham district were asked to assist in building up a map of the weed infestations by using colour coded dots on a base map which showed property boundaries. It is hoped that this map might form the basis of a 'weed strategy' for the different areas within the district.

Our thanks go to the three speakers, **Tim, Angela and Lachlan** who so willingly gave up their Saturday afternoon to help us. Our thanks also to the Hanging Rock Winery and John Ellis who sponsored gifts for our participants.

Weed of the month:

Paterson's curse *Echium plantagineum*

Paterson's curse, also known as Salvation Jane and Riverina Bluebell, is germinating now, and *now* is the time to deal with it effectively.

You may be familiar with the sea of purple flowers that engulfs some parts of Victoria. The plant is an annual that initially forms a basal rosette of leaves (as shown on the fridge magnet photo) and then sends up an erect flowering stem ca. 50cm. Its purple/blue funnel shaped flowers appear in late Spring, and many seeds are produced over Summer. The seed can be spread by animals, in hay or silage, in wool or by human vehicles.

It is a proclaimed noxious weed that is present in our district in a number of areas.

These outbreaks are still relatively small and if we can prevent further seeding this Summer, we can prevent it from becoming widespread. Residual seed in the soil can germinate over several years, so follow-up checks and treatment will be required annually for 4-5 years in Autumn/Winter before we can declare ourselves free of Paterson's Curse, *but this is an attainable goal*. It will become much harder for each year it is delayed!

Control

Identify the rosette of leaves that form in Autumn/Winter and either grub out by hand or mattock, or use a glyphosate spray (trade names: Weedmaster or Roundup), which is a non-residual herbicide.

For more detailed information go to <http://www.weeds.crc.org.au> or contact the Department of Primary Industries Office in Kyneton for Landcare Notes on Paterson's Curse.

Weed Warriors

Grade 4 of Woodend Primary School, based at Carlesruhe, are going to become Weed Warriors in conjunction with the Newham & District Landcare Group. They will learn about the gorse spider mite in order to breed colonies for release at a local site.

The gorse spider mite is a tiny insect, about half a millimetre in diameter, that was introduced to Australia in 1999 for use as a biological control agent on gorse. It lives in colonies in a fine, communal web that is spun over the host plant. It feeds only on gorse, causing the foliage to look bleached or brown. Heavy feeding pressure can kill shoots, reduce overall plant growth and abort the production of flowers. The mite has a prodigious capacity to reproduce, especially in warm conditions. Biological *control* is just that – it won't *eradicate* the weed but can reduce the spread and density of the weed, making it a useful part of an integrated weed management program.

Indigenous Plants

by Marie Marmara

What are indigenous plants?

“Indigenous” means native, or belonging naturally, and so refers to plants that are native to the soil of a particular region. These plants are the original flora of the area prior to European settlement. Some people call them “local natives”.

Why use indigenous plants?

Plants that are the original flora of an area are survivors. These plants have evolved over thousands of years to cope with the local climate, environmental stresses and certain soil conditions.

Benefits of using indigenous plants:

Promoting local species helps to conserve the diversity of our local gene pool. In addition, local plants:

- create habitat for local fauna
- are adapted to local conditions, so survival rate is higher than for non-local species
- Often need less water
- Have less need for fertilizers
- Reduce pest outbreaks
- Mostly self-seed readily, therefore adding to your original investment over the years
- Don't need imported foreign soil which may contain weed seeds

Macedon Ranges Information Day

On October 10 at the Newham Hall, information will be available on upper-, middle- and under-storey plants indigenous to the Macedon Ranges. Soil type, altitude, proximity to natural drainage lines or creeks all make a difference to how well things grow!

Please see final page of this newsletter for contact details of some local suppliers of indigenous trees.

Treeproject

Treeproject is a Melbourne-based organisation that uses volunteers to grow seedlings for landholders or Landcare groups. In 2004/05 the price per tube will be 25c plus cost of the seed. Some conditions apply!

1. Species grown must be local to the area where they will be planted
2. Minimum number of any one species is 48 [1 box]
3. Minimum order is 14 boxes (around 500 seedlings)
4. Orders must be in multiples of 14 boxes

The Landcare Group will submit a group order, allowing you to order small numbers of individual species if you wish. Species available will be limited by seed available. Orders will be taken on October 10 when we gather at the Newham Mechanics Institute Hall. Orders for 2004/2005 are due in by the end of October. If you wish to order direct from Treeproject, the contact points are:

Telephone: 9650 9477

Email: info@treeproject.asn.au

Web site: www.treeproject.asn.au.

For 2004/2005 the species list is likely to be as follows:-

Eucalyptus pauciflora, Snow gum
E. viminalis, Manna gum
E. rubida, Candlebark
E. radiata, Narrow leaf peppermint
E. obliqua, Messmate
E. ovata, Swamp gum
E. melliodora, Yellow box
Acacia melanoxylon, Blackwood
A. implexa, Lightwood
A. mearnsii, Black wattle
A. dealbata, Silver wattle

Treeproject also allows you to be your own grower, providing you with a kit, training sessions, written instructions and a support person for any queries you have.

Seed collection and plant propagation

You can collect seed from your own property.

A permit is required for all other places.

Do you want to learn how to collect & store seed?

Do you have seed to spare and are happy for someone else to collect it?

Do you want to learn how to propagate native species?

Register your interest on October 10!

Suppliers of indigenous trees:

A & B Trees, Heathcote, 5433 2236

Acres Wild, Woodend, 5427 2007

Kate Barton, 5423 4184

Granite Ridge Nursery, Lancefield, 5429 1904

Goldfields Revegetation Nursery, Bendigo, 5439 5384

Macedon Nursery, Macedon, 5426 2558

Marie Marmara, 5427 0258

That's all for this month. We would welcome your input into the newsletter. If you wish to make a submission, please send it to the editor, Amanda Cole, by 15 September:

Email: amandina@netspace.net.au or

Fax: 5427 0383

Below: Weed Forum. Left to right: Lachlan Milne, Angela Gladman, Tim Sansom, Jim Sansom, Sally Stabback.

