



Newsletter of the Weed Society of Victoria Inc.

volume 22 issue 1 2011

Weedscene

Contentious Perspectives on Weeds

Each year the Weed Society of Victoria hosts a day of seminars that complement the Society's Annual General Meeting (AGM). A theme is selected for each AGM Seminar day, and speakers are recruited to give presentations on a range of aspects relevant to the theme.

The themes of recent seminar series have developed from the notion that we are fighting some sort of 'war against weeds', and that strategies employed to deal with weeds needed to be couched in militaristic and/or law enforcement language and terminology. An alternative view to sending out a posse to apprehend these plant outlaws is to view weeds merely as wild plants that have a number of beneficial uses. The perspectives expressed in these alternatives are becoming more complex as the exponentially increasing global population brings with it an increase in human disturbance of habitat, and a changing landscape for native and exotic plant species.

How plants behave in a changed environment is one thing; how people perceive this plant behaviour is often contentious. This not only opens up for exploration the psychological aspects of people's relationship with weeds, but also the relationship between humans, weeds and nature. As we move into the 21st century, the ground rules are changing for how we work with nature, and influence the framework in which we consider responses to increasingly complex scientific, political and ethical issues relating to what we call 'weeds'.

These differing perspectives on weed-related issues will be the focus of the 2011 Weed Society AGM Seminars, for which the theme will be 'Contentious Perspectives on Weeds'.

Full details of the Annual General Meeting and the AGM Seminars are available in the flyer supplied as an insert with this edition of Weedscene.

Rodney Jones

Seminar presentation summaries

James O'Brien (President, WSV)

Welcome. From a previous life as a dairy farmer to his current occupation as an agronomist with Landmark at Timboon-Cobden, James' only possible point of contentiousness is that he follows St Kilda.

John Dwyer (alumnus of The University of Melbourne) *Weed psychology and the War on Weeds* – John's recently completed PhD thesis 'Weeds in Victorian Landscapes' considered cultural, philosophical and historical aspects of weeds. The thesis resolved the enigma: why there is no acceptable answer to the question 'What is a weed?', exploring such topics as 'There is no essence of a weed' and 'What is the relationship between weeds, humans and nature?' It critically examined the expression 'environmental weed', arguing that there was often no proper basis for attribution of weed status to native plants. For the AGM Seminar John provides an appraisal of psychological aspects of people's relationships with what we call 'weeds' under the title 'Weed psychology and the War on Weeds'.

Paul Downey (University of Canberra)

– The main focus of Paul's research is on plant invasions, specifically the invasion processes, understanding the positive and negative impacts of plant invasions (i.e. to native species), weed risk assessment, native-alien range comparisons, long-term invasion dynamics, alien-native species interactions (including bird dispersal of alien plants), and monitoring (both the



Contentious Perspectives on Weeds

A series of seminars presented by the Weed Society of Victoria

Thursday 14th April 2011

Lecture Theatre, Department of Primary Industries
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WSV Membership Rates 2011

Concession*	\$20.00
Ordinary	\$50.00
Corporate	\$120.00

* Students and Pensioners

WSV is not registered to collect GST

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Joining the Weed Society of Victoria

The benefits of membership to WSV include:

- Weedscene: newsletter packed full of information
- eWeedscene: regular electronic bulletin on weed news and events
- Discounts to WSV seminars, workshops, conferences and other events
- Opportunities to network with others.

To apply for membership, download and print the membership application form from the WSV website, www.wsvic.org.au, complete the details and mail to the WSV Secretary.

Weedscene Newsletter of the Weed Society of Victoria Inc.

Contributions to Weedscene are welcomed. Please contact the editor for further information.

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The views expressed in Weedscene are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the WSV Executive Committee.

Advertising rates

■ One sixth page	56 mm wide × 128 mm high	\$90.00
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■ Half page	180 mm wide × 128 mm high	\$275.00
■ Whole page	180 mm wide × 257 mm high	\$450.00

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weed and the response of native species following control). Paul is also involved in research on climate change, specifically with respect to plant invasions.

David Holmgren (Permaculture Principles) *Weeds or Wild Nature; a positive view of weeds from a permaculture perspective*

– David Holmgren, the co-originator of the permaculture concept of ecological sustainability, draws on more than thirty years studying and managing sites and landscape where the self organising processes of ecological succession are, repairing past damage, providing ecological services and creating new resource opportunities. This message about nature's resilience is a counter balance to the orthodox picture from the biological sciences of endless ecological collapse in the face of human impact. Holmgren's work builds on a long lineage in organic agriculture and ecological science that views weeds as warning signs of our poor land management, 'guardians of the soil', and unrecognised resources. He brings these perspectives into the 21st century where climate change, peak oil and other fundamental challenges to civilisation are changing the ground rules for how we work with nature.

David Severino (Chairperson of the Victorian Apiarists' Association, Melbourne Branch) *Why are weeds important in the honey industry*

– The honeybee, used by apiarists throughout Australia is not a native bee in our country. It is believed the honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) was introduced from Europe in 1822. Therefore, many plants found in Australia, which we refer to as weeds, are actually a native food source to the honeybee. Apiarists rely on some of these plants for honey production and/or pollen production to increase the strength of a beehive. Although most introduced weeds in Australia are beneficial, some are detrimental to the honey industry. A good apiarist will be able to move their bees from crops to ground flora (weeds) during pollination work to encourage a healthy hive of bees. It is also often the case where weeds are flowering and producing nectar and pollen, when little else is available. Without weeds, beekeeping in Australia would be very different to the current form of bee management.

Bruce Shelley (DPI, Future Farming Systems, Werribee) *Some issues associated with the introduction of potentially weedy species as bioenergy crops.*

Diego Bonetto (Sydney-based artist) *Nettle, dock, dandelion and wild fennel: environmental weeds or environmental belonging?*

– In an essay on the practice of exotic mushroom foraging by the Polish community, Max Kwiatkowski argues for a deeper understanding of what he terms 'ethnoscape': the ethnic-specific interaction with landscape, its values and cultural returns. Throughout history, the act of foraging has been exercised by indigenous and non-indigenous people alike. In contemporary times, people from various cultures gather for road trips to the edges of cities to pursue a practice of environmental belonging: foraging for weeds. Tim Low in his book *Feral Future* presents the Australian landscape, as defined in media and politics, as a cultural construct, not objective and grossly used to outline a unified national identity. With this seminar Diego presents the need to acknowledge the social imperative of environmental belonging, a necessary step to consider when fostering care and kinship in these times of disconnection and alienation. He argues that the process of spontaneous, simplistic labelling of exotic species (as good or bad), needs to address the reality of the Australian social and ecological make-up.

Geoff Carr and Steve Mathews (Ecology Australia and Invasive Species Council)

When someone's meat is environmental poison: under what circumstances should we tolerate 'beneficial' invasive plant species – Of the 3000+ naturalised exotic plant species in Australia, at least 70% have been deliberately introduced, with catastrophic environmental and economic consequences. A large proportion of these invasive species are valued by one sector or another for economic and/or social benefits e.g. agriculture, horticulture, forestry, landscape amenity and heritage assets, though 'benefits' in some cases may be illusory. The issues and risks are outlined and attempts made to develop a scientific and ethical framework to consider appropriate responses in this environmental, social and political minefield.

David Low (Monash University and DPI Frankston) *Dissent, Conflict, Enquiry: A systems view of weed controversy*

– Controversies arise out of disagreements about something. Enquiry is the preferred path scientists use to explore and communicate with each other in order to dissolve controversy. Taking his lead from the domain of science communication, David Low argues that the critically controlled agreements scientists use to relate to each other and their subject matter can be generalised to the task of dissolving weed controversies. In this view, controversies are viewed as emergent properties of our interactions with plants.

Weeds arise because humans find certain plants troublesome, or perhaps because they want to advocate on behalf of certain plants they think find certain other plants troublesome. Thus, in an enquiry perspective, a weed controversy can be defined as, 'any communication concerning a troublesome plant that seeks to create a shared understanding of what needs to be changed'. David uses this definition to suggest that what is required is a method of communication that enables the plant to reveal to us both the social and the ecological characteristics we use to define it (the plant) as a weed. If we are unable to do this, we will deny both ecosystem and a commitment to finding out. In other words, we can sustain a weed controversy by refusing to enquire into both the social and the bio-physical aspects of the controversy.

Any success we might have in redesigning ecosystems to control and/or prevent weeds will ultimately depend on our ecoliteracy. Ecoliteracy refers to the contexts of plant-human responsibility and includes the rhetorical frameworks that enable us to define it. Thus, in a biosecurity context, it is not in anyone's long-term interest to promote a 'war on weeds' without also recognising the contingent frameworks that enable us to appreciate weeds in the first place. If we incorporate the socially constructed aspects of weed controversies into our efforts to redesign ecosystems, the disagreements surrounding troublesome plants will eventually be dissolved. This outcome can only be achieved by learning more about how to live with plants.



17th Australasian Weeds Conference 26–30 September 2010, Christchurch, NZ

The first Australian Weeds Conference (AWC) was held in Roseworthy, South Australia, in 1954 and the first conference of the Council of Australian Weed Science Societies in Melbourne in 1978. Since 2002 these conferences have become biennial events, held under the auspices of what is now the Council of Australasian Weeds Societies (CAWS) and organised in turn by each of the state weed societies. The 17th AWC was actually the first *Australasian* Conference and the first to be held outside Australia, as a result of the New Zealand Plant Protection Society (NZPPS) joining CAWS.

AWCs have become the most important event in the calendar for Australian weed researchers and weed management professionals because they provide a detailed overview of the range of recent weed work undertaken in the region, and make available the latest research results, policy developments and advances in management. The feast of information provided and the opportunity to meet and catch up with colleagues makes for a very attractive few days.

The 17th AWC, 'New Frontiers in New Zealand', was organised and hosted by the NZPPS at the Christchurch Convention Centre, near the centre of the city. The Canterbury area of New Zealand, including Christchurch, was hit by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake at 4.35 am on 4 September 2010, and there was great initial concern that the resulting damage and disruption might put the conference in peril. However structural damage in Christchurch was mainly restricted to old buildings, utility services were resilient or quickly repaired, there was no major accommodation crisis, and it was soon announced that the conference would go ahead. For visitors this became an additional tourist attraction: many attendees experienced the strong aftershocks that occurred on the Saturday before the conference and on the final day.

The conference was attended by almost exactly 200 delegates, a much smaller

number than the previous few conferences in Australia (Cairns 2008 – 403 delegates, Adelaide 2006 – 469, Wagga 2004 – 347, Perth 2002 – 380). This reflects in part the demise of the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management in 2008 and a collapse in funding for weeds by State governments in Australia. Restrictions on government workers attending international conferences may also have played a role, and for Australians in general the overseas venue may have been a disincentive.

In total there were approximately 170 papers, 109 oral presentations and 34 posters. As with previous conferences, the proceedings were structured with plenary sessions in the morning, followed by concurrent sessions during the rest of the day. Opinion was divided about whether the deliberate absence of chairs for the concurrent sessions worked effectively.

Evaluation feedback rated Prof Philip Hulme of Lincoln University as the most enjoyable presenter with his talk on predicting the next major weeds. The keynote address by Dr Stephen Moss of Rothamsted Research on the benefits and limitations of non-chemical weed control in cropping in Europe was another popular presentation. The need to focus on alternative methods has been driven by a reduction of available pesticides (from 945 actives in 1999 to 336 in 2009), increased herbicide resistance (62 weed species, more than one third of which are grasses) and new EU regulatory actions. The innovative thinking of Dr Paul Downey (monitoring programs to assess native plant recovery after environmental weed control; do weed management programs align with weed policy objectives? etc.). was also widely appreciated. The CAWS oration by Paul Champion (National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, NZ) on aquatic weeds was another presentation that was highly enjoyed.

Five whole-day field trips on environmental weeds, aquatic weeds, forestry weeds, weeds of cropping and weeds of pastures provided a mid-week break from the

intense listening and a chance to see some of the country. The conference dinner was held that night, with delegates seated at numerous large round tables, and included a wonderfully haunting music and dance performance.

During the dinner the CAWS Medal for Leadership was presented to Jack Caw of Auckland Regional Council. In contrast to most previous winners, rewarded largely for research and academic outputs, Jack was recognised for his achievements as a biosecurity activist, weed strategist and extension wizard and for facilitating practical on-ground weed management. Many readers may have met him during his period of employment at the Keith Turnbull Research Institute of DPI at Frankston (2000–2003).

On the final day Nigel Ainsworth provided a pitch on behalf of the Weed Society of Victoria for the forthcoming 18th Conference to be held in Melbourne in 2012.

The published conference *Papers and Proceedings* edited by Sue Zydenbos, totals 506 pages of peer reviewed papers and abstracts along with author and subject indices, compiled with the assistance of 67 reviewers. It was again typeset and designed by Rob and Fiona Richardson. Enquiries about obtaining copies can be made to the NZPPS by email at secretary@nzpps.org.

Our thanks are due to the organising Committee chaired by Trevor James and consisting of Ian Popay, Kerry Harrington, Mary Hiron, Ronny Groenteman, Paul Champion, Mike Watt, Graeme Bourdôt, Helen Braithwaite and Rachel Greenwood, with Jan Latham of Lincoln University the Conference and Event Coordinator. Indications are that the conference generated a profit of about \$20,000, half of which is paid to CAWS.

I thank the Weed Society of Victoria for sponsoring my attendance, which enabled the presentation of a summary of my recently submitted PhD thesis on the impact of Chilean needle grass on biodiversity in Australian native grasslands.

Ian Faithfull

New woody weed management resource

Dow AgroSciences have recently launched a specialist woody weeds based portal for their customers including reseller stores, council weed officers/contractors and National Parks. <http://www.woodyweedspecialists.com.au/>

Registered members can access the extensive library of technical resources and demonstration videos on effective woody weed control as well as product labels, MSDS and technical articles on brushweed management. There is also an extensive range of management weedsheets on key woody weeds with an opportunity to order on line. Anyone wishing to register is welcome to visit the site and do so.

New pasture herbicide registration pending

Torpedo Herbicide from Dow AgroSciences has registration pending* for control of many broadleaf weeds in ryegrass pastures. Torpedo offers excellent ryegrass selectivity and short grazing withholding periods (7 days) that will allow dairy and livestock producers to safely and cost-effectively manage their pastures to maximise production.

* Registraton pending from APVMA.



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WSV Annual General Meeting 2011

12.45 pm Thursday 14th April 2011

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I, (a) appoint

(b)

as my proxy to represent me at the AGM on 14th April 2011 and vote on any motion as
he/she sees fit.

Signed Date / /

(a) Name of financial member wishing to vote (non-financial members votes excluded).

(b) Insert name of member attending meeting to whom proxy is delegated.

NOMINATION FORM

WSV Committee Positions

I nominate

Company/Position

For the position of

Signed Date / /

Seconded Date / /

NOMINATIONS CAN ONLY BE MADE BY FINANCIAL MEMBERS

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