

# Invasive Species

INVASIVE SPECIES ARE INTRODUCED SPECIES THAT HAVE NATURALISED AND HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS. MOST PEOPLE KNOW THAT FOXES, RABBITS, CANE TOADS AND INDIAN MYNAS ARE ALL INVASIVE SPECIES BUT INVASIVE SPECIES ALSO INCLUDES PARASITES, FUNGI, INSECTS AND WEEDS.

## INVASIVE FAUNA

Indian mynas and cane toads are two of the most destructive invasive species and may be found in your garden. There are several things you can do to help limit the populations of toads and mynas.

1. Grow your lawn longer because toads and mynas love short manicured lawns.
2. Don't feed these pests; this includes not leaving unattended pet food outside.
3. Toad proof your ponds and dams.
4. Join the Indian Myna trapping program.
5. Join a toad buster group.

## PETS

It is important to remember that pets such as cats and dogs are introduced species and need to be managed in a way that doesn't adversely affect our native fauna. Don't let your pets roam freely and keep cats in the house, especially at night.

## WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL WEED?

Some of the most invasive species with the biggest impact on our native bushlands have escaped from gardens. These plants are environmental weeds and Australia's 2011 State of the Environment Report identified Weed invasion to be a threatening process for one-third of rare species in Australia.

Environmental weeds are plants growing outside of their natural distribution that have a negative impact on the natural ecosystems and the plants and animals within those ecosystems. These weeds are introduced into new areas by human activities. Sometimes this is accidental such as via transport but most often, plants are bought for the home garden and then escape. In fact one hundred and twenty four environmental weed species are still being sold in nurseries across New South Wales!

## HOW CAN MY GARDEN PLANTS THREATEN BIODIVERSITY?

Some introduced plants have a direct impact on native animals. For example the introduced species Dutchman's Pipe has very similar leaves to the native Richmond Birdwing Vine. When the Richmond Birdwing butterfly accidentally lays its eggs on the exotic plant the caterpillars are poisoned.

Most environmental weeds simply out-compete native plants for light, water, nutrients and



Indian Myna  
Photo: Wendy Gibney

space. Invasive vines such as Morning Glory, Madeira Vine and Cat's Claw Creeper are some of the worst environmental weeds as they smother native plants, completely blocking photosynthesis and can grow thick enough to break branches and bring down entire trees and shrubs.

## HOW DO THE PLANTS ESCAPE FROM GARDENS?

Garden waste dumping is a serious threat to native bushland as weeds are directly spread into new areas. But environmental weeds may also be spread indirectly. Seeds can be dispersed by birds or bats, some may be wind-blown or spread by water and still others have sticky seeds that cling to clothing, pets or even vehicles. Plants such as the Madeira Vine spread vegetatively and even a small leaf is enough to start a new infestation. So no matter how careful you are, environmental weeds in your garden can still spread to natural ecosystems. It's best not to have them in the first place.

## NOT ALL INTRODUCED SPECIES ARE A PROBLEM

Many exotic species of plants from other parts of the world pose no threat at all. Roses, gardenias and azaleas are all exotic plants but none of these have the potential to become invasive species.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO STOP THE SPREAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL WEEDS?

1. Learn which plants are environmental weeds.
2. Don't plant environmental weeds and gradually remove weeds.
3. Plant local native species.
4. Buy plants from Bushland friendly nurseries.
5. Carefully dispose of environmental weeds and their seeds.
6. Join your local Landcare or Dunecare group.

## CAMPHOR LAUREL

Camphor laurels have become very common in our region. Camphors now serve a role in our environment - many rainforest birds have adapted to feed on the seeds and local wildlife, including koalas, use them for shelter and stepping stones to move across the landscape. If all the camphors are removed on a property at once, without a seed bank being present, then you will probably end up with an even worse weed problem than when you started. However if you kill an area of camphors that are surrounded by native bush using a camphor conversion technique, then amazing results will be achieved. Camphors on creek banks are not ideal as their roots do not hold the banks together. Native species such as watergum, casuarina, figs and lomandra have matting fibrous roots and are also able to withstand the large pressure of water when our rivers flood.



Cane Toad  
Photo: Wendy Gibney

## WEEDS – THE GOOD NEWS

Nature doesn't like gaps. Wherever there is space to grow, something fills it, usually weeds. Weeds can provide an important role in binding the soil together and providing habitat for native species. There is nothing as bad as bare soil – this is an invitation for loose precious topsoil and the runoff can lead to pollution of waterways. Whether you are doing natural regeneration (is there a native seedbank still active in your soil?), or planting, it is imperative to have a plan when attacking weeds.

## HOW TO TACKLE WEEDS?

Each site is different and will have a different weed story. Look and think which are your biggest weed priorities. Start small and watch and learn what nature does on your site. Good questions to ask are:

- Does the weed strangle or smother?
- What is going to happen when I remove all these weeds?

- How am I going to manage and maintain the site? How much time do I have available?
- Is there something I can do to give nature a hand – broadcasting local seeds, controlling annual weeds, mulching plantings?
- How can I get more light and heat into my site to improve native seed germination.

*Below are some of the exotic species introduced into Australian gardens that have escaped to become serious environmental weeds.*

*Photos courtesy of Byron Shire Council.*



Morning Glory



Maderia Vine



Cat's Claw



Small-leaved Privet



Buddleja



Glory Lily