

Summertime activities for bushcarers

By MAURICE ROCHE

Bush For Life Field Officer

Many bushcarers take a break from on-ground activities over the hotter months, but if you can find a cooler day or work early in the mornings it's a good time to liberate local plants from the impacts of woody weeds, introduced ephemeral herbs and summer-active alien grasses.

Remember that plants need to be in active growth for effective herbicide treatment - wait to wipe wilting weeds till after rains. Hand-pulling is not an option either in dry soil due to the disturbance factor but other mechanical methods (ie. cutting below the lignotuber of *Olea europaea* (olive) seedlings) can be used.

Woody weeds can be drilled and filled (as long as they are not too drought stressed). Stems as small as 1cm diameter can have a hole or two drilled into them by a careful carer and topped-up a couple of times with Glyphosate 1:5 to ensure success. Cut the woody stems of smaller plants like *Scabiosa atropurpurea* (scabious) or *Plantago lanceolata* (ribwort) close to the ground and swab with Glyphosate 1:5. Single rosettes can be swabbed without cutting.

Following rain, summer



(ribwort).



One of Trees For Life's Bush Action Teams tackles a problem area in Adelaide Gully, Kersbrook

active ephemeral herbs such as *Tribulus terrestris* (caltrop) are a priority. They seed opportunistically throughout the year. Cut the entire plant from the tap root and bag it for appropriate disposal to prevent spreading the seeds. Wireweed (*Polygonum aviculare*), an annual which germinates in spring and seeds over summer, can be despatched in the same way.

Where it occurs, the summer-active, perennial grass *Hyparrhenia hirta* (Coolatai grass) is a top priority for carers. This weed should always be removed, regardless of its proximity to a native plant. Cut down Coolatai tussocks and three weeks later, spot-spray the regrowth carefully to avoid off-target damage. Kill new recruits of one or two stems using the Tongs of Death. Re-treat at three-weekly intervals. On every visit, strip seed-heads and bag them for appropriate disposal.

Respect Joe Blake and the sun, enjoy your site and have fun.

Mistletoe's bad name unwarranted

By KIM JARMYN

The native plant featured on the cover of this *ReLeaf* edition is *Amyema miquelii*, or box mistletoe, one of the five species of Mistletoe native to the Adelaide region.

Mistletoes are found all over the world, but the 60 species found in Australia are all native, with 17 of these occurring in South Australia (Mistletoe Action Group, MAG 2004).

Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic plant, which means they take water and nutrients from trees and shrubs, but they do photosynthesise, producing their own energy from sunlight. They are a natural part of the ecosystem and in a healthy ecosystem rarely become a burden on the host tree - in fact they are a vital food source for native wildlife including possums, birds (which use the nectar and fruit when little else is flowering) and insects, including butterflies. Mistletoe is protected under the Native Vegetation Act.

Mistletoes form an oval shaped foliage hanging from the branch of the host tree: they grow to about an arm's width, and have red or yellow flowers

(Prescott, 1988). Each species of mistletoe grows on different host plants, mainly Eucalypts, but also wattles, sheoaks and others, and on a couple of Bush For Life sites we have even seen them growing on woody weeds such as Olives and Tagasaste! They often camouflage well with the tree, and from a distance the foliage can look similar. Mistletoe is mainly spread by birds depositing seeds on branches. When the seed germinates, it grows down into the branch of the tree and taps into its nutrient system.

Where mistletoe numbers become high enough to place stress on the host tree and community, it is generally a symptom of a larger problem. An example is at some locations in the Clare Valley where box mistletoe numbers have become high enough to negatively impact on eucalypt communities. This is thought to be due to declining numbers of possums, who eat the leaves and flowers of the plant, and are also thought to eat mistletoe seedlings. Nesting boxes are being erected to restore possum numbers. MAG has produced an informative booklet on the topic called "*Living with Mistletoe: Mistletoe Management Guidelines for the Mount Lofty Ranges*"

So next time you're smooching under the mistletoe, you'll know much more about it!