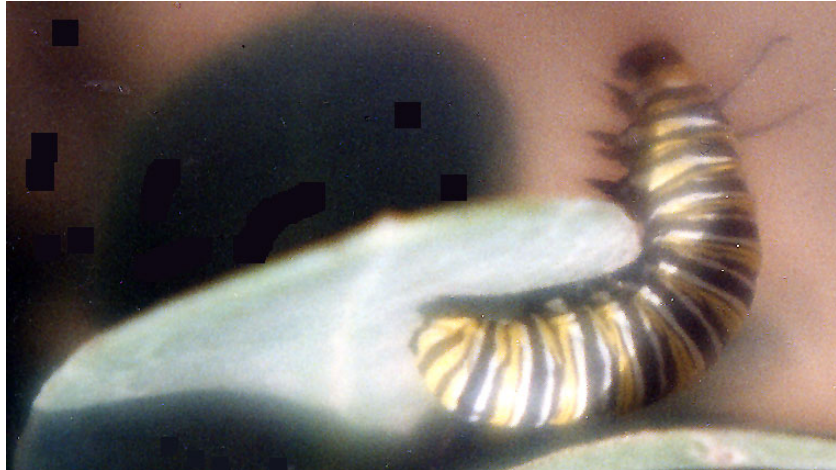




Bush For Life

Native butterflies suffer as cotton bush caters to the monarch



Left: Close up of the mature larva of the monarch butterfly eating from the leaf of the broad leaf cotton bush (*Asclepias rotundifolia*). Photo by Graham Greaves.

The broad leaf cotton bush (*Asclepias rotundifolia*) is becoming a problem in our native bushland.

While you may see it growing in an isolated spot, you may also find it growing amongst native herbaceous plants such as Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*), which it can eventually outcompete.

Some people don't like to remove the broad leaf cotton bush from their Bush For Life site or gardens, as it is habitat for the introduced monarch butterfly.

But leaving the cotton bush for the monarch butterfly would be like leaving an olive as habitat for starlings.

It is keeping one pest to help another.

Through competition, the broad leaf cotton bush is reducing the number of native larval food plants that grow for many Australian native butterflies.

Native plants in competition with the broad leaf cotton bush are the Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*), scurf pea (*Psoralea patens*), pictured below with the pea blue butterfly mature larva, *Lomandra* species such as scented mat-rush, stiff mat-rush and irongrass and also *Acacias*.

Broad leaf cotton bush

The broad leaf cotton bush was introduced to Australia from South Africa in the 1800s and is used by the monarch butterfly

as a larval food plant. During the 1800s the Monarch butterfly "island hopped" its way to Australia, perhaps aided by ships.

The monarch or wanderer butterfly is native to northern America and populations in the North-West of America migrate to Monterey in California to overwinter.

The migration habit of the butterfly is unknown in Australia, but it is known that this species, along with the broad leaf cotton bush, are introduced and are competing with our native plants and butterflies. Some monarchs are now eating native plants.

How to identify it

The broad leaf cotton bush grows to waist high, sometimes taller.

The leaves are bright green with white veins that surround the stem. The stem contains a poisonous milky sap and the fruit is large (about 6cm) and hairy.

Pinkish-white flowers appear at the top of the plant in groups.

How to remove it

Cutting and swabbing this plant is the best method for removal.

Be sure to check for follow up work as it may re shoot.

If the plant is growing amongst native bush, then the stem may not be growing straight up, in which case you need to follow the stem along the ground to find the base, as it may be trailing.

Cut and swab using the new swabbers that we have with the sponge tip applicator.

We are in the process of handing these out to our carers, so if you haven't received one yet, please call and we will send one out to you.

A food source for our native butterflies

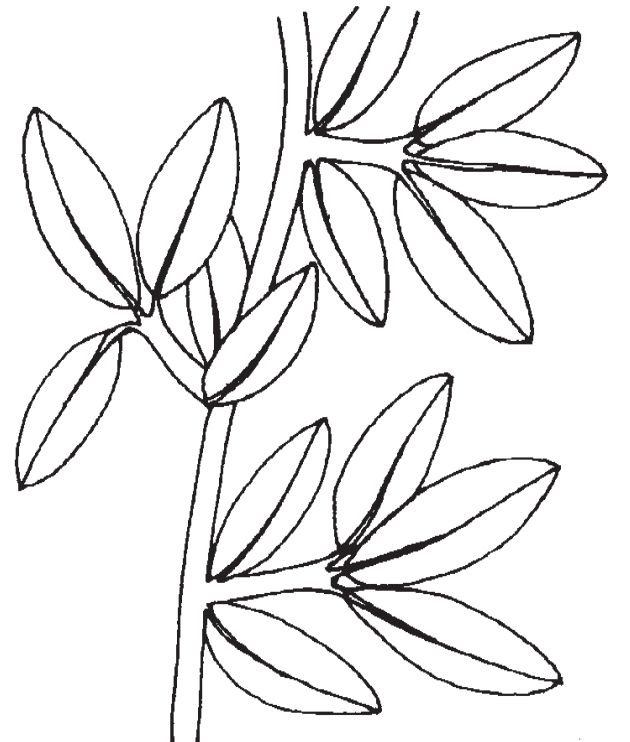
Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*) is one native plant that the introduced cotton bush is competing with for space.

It is a larval food plant, suitable for the pea blue and the common grass blue native butterflies.

Australian trefoil

This perennial herb is from the Leguminosae family and grows to shin high. It has stiff hollow stems that can grow upright or along the ground.

The leaves consist of five small leaflets,



Above: An Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*). Detail of the leaf structure. Drawing by Lisa Waters.

Below: The Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*) bush. Photo by Graham Greaves.



three of which are grouped at the tip of the stem, with the remaining two at the base of the same stem.

The pink or white flowers can be found on a separate, longer stem with three leaflets growing at the base of each flower. Australian trefoil (*Lotus australis*) grows in many areas surrounding Adelaide. It is a densely leaved low growing shrub, flowering in Spring.

Only by increasing the number of native plants will we increase the number of native butterflies.

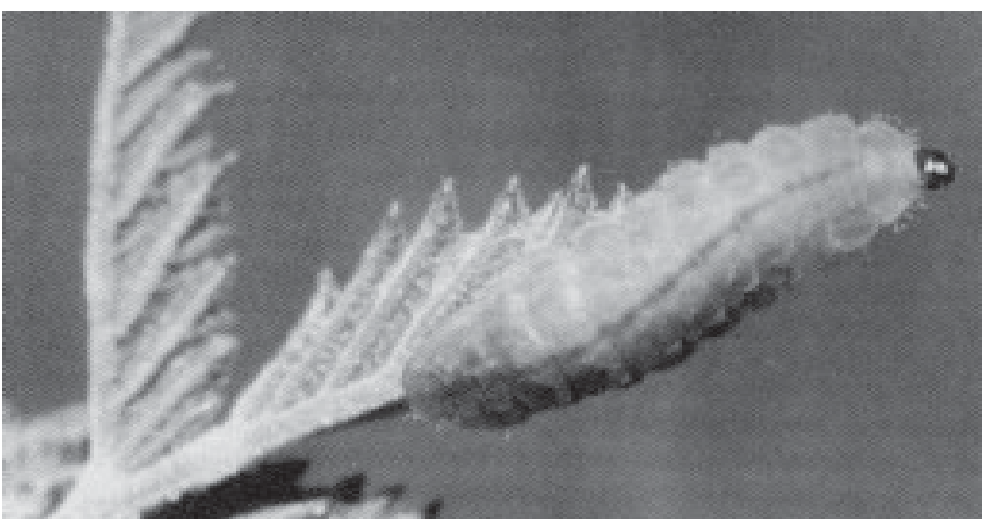
Kerry Greaves,
Bush For Life
Field Support Officer



Above: Detail of broad leaf cotton bush (*Asclepias rotundifolia*), a monarch caterpillar can be seen on the far left leaf. Photo by Kerry Greaves.



Above: The male pea blue butterfly (*Lampides boeticus*), a local native to South Australia. Photo courtesy of R Fisher's Butterflies of South Australia.



Above: Mature larva of the pea blue butterfly eating from the leaf of a scurf pea (*Psoralea patens*) Picture courtesy of R Fisher's Butterflies of South Australia.



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