

WEEDS OF THE SCENIC RESERVES

[Weeds pose very serious threats to the well-being of scenic reserves. To keep members aware of this problem we reprint a section written by A.E. Esler in "Scenic reserves of the lower North Auckland land district" by R.O. Gardner, D.J. Court and A.E. Esler and published by Department of Lands and Survey, 1981.]

Weeds of the scenic reserves

The importance of weeds in scenic reserves depends not only on the quantities but also on their persistence. While gorse is the most prevalent exotic shrub it is at the same time one of the least menacing. It is a relic of former vegetation which is relatively short-lived and does not spread after other vegetation closes in around it. It makes good ecological sense to leave gorse where it is to continue promoting forest development in a way that no other plant can. A ridiculous situation arises when a noxious plants officer insists that it be destroyed because the law says it must be destroyed.

Other transitory plants are the wattles (*Acacia mearnsii* and *Albizia lophantha*), *Hakea sericea*, barberry (*Berberis glaucoarpa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*), Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinensis*), *Euonymus japonicus*, Himalaya honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*), woolly nightshade or flannel leaf (*Solanum mauritianum*), and pampas (*Cortaderia jubata*). Efforts to clear these from some places could result in perpetuation of conditions which favour them.

There is more justification for controlling pines (*Pinus radiata* and *P. pinaster*) particularly while open communities remain for them to invade, and the large-leaved privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) which is long-lived and has shade-tolerant seedlings. *Hakea salicifolia* and willows (mainly *Salix fragilis*) are not readily replaced by native plants either.

The most prevalent and most damaging of all forest weeds is wandering Jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*). Some has established from garden refuse, but deliberate introduction into some forest remnants is suspected. Control is out of the question except at the early stages of colonisation.

Climbing weeds have the potential to cause severe damage but have not yet become very important. *Elaeagnus pungens* and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) pose the greatest threats because of their denseness and free spread by bird-borne seeds. Traveller's joy (*Clematis vitalba*), the scourge of reserves in the southern half of the North Island, does not appear to pose a very serious problem here. It has been seen in one reserve. The potential of passion-fruits (*Passiflora edulis* and *P. mollissima*) is probably not great. Climbing dock (*Rumex sagittatus*) and moth plant (*Araujia hortorum*) which are so abundant in urban areas have not invaded scenic reserves but may become troublesome.

Wild ginger (*Hedycbium gardnerianum*) finds ideal conditions on forest margins and in clearings. This could become one of the major weeds in urban reserves. Mist flower (*Eupatorium riparium*) and Mexican devil (*E. adenophorum*) to a lesser extent, seem set to take over moist semi-open situations, particularly along streams. We are also likely to see a lot more montbretia (*Crocsmia crocosmiflora*).

Some recent horticultural invaders are *Acmena smithii*, *Plectranthus ecklonii* and *Eupatorium sordidum*. The potential of these as weeds is unknown. The *Plectranthus* and *Eupatorium* look conspicuously alien in native forest but may not be harmful otherwise. *Acmena* is an enigma. It seems well fitted to impress itself on the Auckland landscape but is still sparingly naturalised. Apparently only a few of the abundant seeds germinate. Native pigeons which carry the seeds into reserves may stimulate germination.

The total weed flora of the reserves has not been recorded but is likely to exceed 300 species. Only relatively few are harmful. The majority are light-demanding herbs which appear only briefly before being overtaken by the vigorous native vegetation.