

Battling the cane toad menace

There's a wispy mist billowing out of the nearby dam / frog pond that is home to many a frog and wading bird alike. This morning there is a Heron strutting its way around the edges, taking the tasty morsels and deep throat wagging them all the way down its gullet.

It's all a bit surreal and in the early morning light, I imagine a hand holding a cleaver raising from the depths. The ethereal spirit of the frogpond, eternally green and covered in slime moulds and algae, has decided to offer me a solution to the cane toads that have appeared since I slashed my property a few weeks ago. The lumpy old toads have decided that as they can now cross my terrain without too much effort, they'd like to take up residence in my frogpond. We shall see...

A couple of nights ago I saw a doco on the blighters



Stu's View from the Loo
by Stuart McConville

compliments of the ABC. I was amused, saddened, angered and motivated by the stories of the many toad lovers, haters and nonchalant types interviewed, but most of all I was smitten with curiosity, one which has driven me to hunt and destroy the unwelcome invaders.

So along with a small army of wwoofers and a powerful spotlight, we set out at night to capture alive the plaguing

pests. The bigger males give themselves away with their throaty calls that sound like a firefighter pump with a leaky exhaust, so we tracked them around the dam in our gumboots, carefully sneaking up to within striking distance whilst blinding them with torch light.

With lightning reflexes, I attacked from the rear, snatching up their hind leg with my bare hand. The wwoofers, all curious and in wonderment at the caught beast, approached tentatively for a better view. They'd heard about the toad and it's potential for getting high, so I offered to show them the source of the poison.

Whilst examining the milky gland with my fingers, the toad shot out a wad of white toxicity that caught the nearest wwoofer on the thigh. She casually wiped it off with her finger and stuck it in her mouth, then proceeded to swear and curse

about the disgusting taste! I was fairly amazed. After bagging a dozen or so big male toads, we returned to the house to tell stories of the giant toad that got away. The toads went into the freezer to die peacefully and my wwoofer went to bed to strange dreams...

The following evening, I defrosted the toads, removed the meaty rear legs (with the cleaver) and prepared them for dinner... no I'm not kidding. A slow marinate in soy, olive oil and ABC, lightly fried over medium heat and we enjoyed our first toad legs entrée. All agreed they were quite delicious and would eat them again any day, and we have...

A resource is a resource, there is free food just begging for more top level predators to control the numbers and we have been squeamish for too long, so, my friends, go forth and hunt, kill and enjoy.

Stu runs Pooh Solutions compost toilets and consultancy. For more info check out: www.poohsolutions.com or call Stu on 0427-897-496.

PLANT OF THE MONTH



Celerywood
Polyscias elegans

by Richard Burer,
Project Officer, EnviTE

A graceful and handsome fast growing tree, celerywood is found in most forest types, it is equally home in subtropical rainforest or hanging in or around the edges of

the drier forest types and it is very common in the Nimbin area.

Celerywood is straight growing to 30m with decorative compound leaves and purple flowers forming into purple, black fruits, which are relished by a variety of birds including Figbird, Lewins Honeyeater, Green Catbird and various rainforest pigeons.

On the farm, in the garden and in your restoration projects Celerywood is a must for tree plantings, a specimen I planted around 15 years ago has grown to 15-20 metres and its prolific fruits have spread around the forest and it is regenerating happily.

Tolerant of most soil types, it grows best in soils of volcanic origin.

More weeds!

by Triny Roe

The weather has been great for the summer growing season. Lots of rain, interspersed with hot sunny days means everything grows at a great rate: the plants we want as well as the ones we don't.

Some of the plants that are considered weeds - naturalised species or over-running plants - are easy to spot. Giant Devil's Fig, *Solanum chrysotrichum*, which grows to three to four metres high, is an easy one to find and remove before it flowers, sets fruit and produces seed. This plant has spiky thorns on its stems and prickly leaves. Vigorous, fast growing and able to tolerate a range of conditions it will readily establish as the predominate species if left to its own devices.

Until recently GDF was mostly confined to the Tuntable Valley. It's now found in Nightcap National Park, Terania Creek, Rosebank and spreading through the Nimbin area. Isolated specimens can appear, seemingly out of nowhere, seed carried afar by birds or even on car tyres or agricultural machinery. Water is another dispersal method. Seed can be washed down the hills and carried into the creeks by the deluges of torrential rain experienced in this region. New plants often appear along creek banks. Significant numbers of new plants will also spring up in the vicinity of a parent plant eventually forming a forest.

To avoid an ever increasing grove do not let the GDF set fruit and produce seed. Control measures where mature plants have been established for a



Cuphea or Waxweed is a pretty little thing with tiny pink purple flowers. Awww, Sweet! But do you really want it to take over on your place?

while will include regular follow up to remove new seedlings which are likely to continue to germinate for a number of years.

(Alternatively, someone establish an industry, harvesting from existing plants, to produce fungicides. This species contains several anti-fungal agents. In its home country of Mexico, GDF is a traditional treatment for tinea.)

GDF is soon to be declared a Noxious Weed in the Northern Rivers Region. It is already declared in SE Qld. Many people are not keen to see this plant become a familiar face in any more valleys in the Northern Rivers region and the nearby National Parks.

Be vigilant after any soil disturbance on your property such as digging utilities, road works and other activities such as slashing and clearing lantana. Look for new plants appearing. If you can get them in the seedling stage your task is minimal. Leave them till they are giant trees and it's herculean!

Other weeds are small and seemingly delicate. Because of their less significant size they are easily overlooked and maybe harder to detect before they have established themselves in a new location.

One such plant is Columbian waxweed, *Cuphea carthagenensis*. It is related to Mexican heather, *Cuphea hyssopifolia*, a common garden plant. The waxweed is distinguished by larger, paired leaves and sticky, hairy stems. When mowed it stays small and low but it can also grow up to 60 cm high, scrambling happily though long grass. Columbian waxweed can tolerate a range of conditions and loves waterlogged areas. With frequent high rainfall, it doesn't take long for this dainty plant to become the dominant species in pasture or lawn.

This weed is not on any hit lists yet, just watch lists, as it is only considered an 'emerging threat' at this stage. First recorded in Murwillumbah in 1973, it was also found in Bundaberg in the 1980s. It is now common in Northern NSW, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, particularly in parks and public mown areas and along roadsides.

Here in Nimbin it is entrenched on the verges of many sections of Gungas Road and on a number of properties in that valley. No doubt it is also happily growing in lots of other local places as well. The seeds are easily transported on car tyres, mowing machinery, on footwear and by water.

If you see a single waxweed plant, carefully pull it out by the roots and dispose of in a bin, unless you want this plant overrunning your existing pasture and lawn species, getting into your bush zones, and establishing along creek banks and waterways.

Tawny frogmouth chick reunited with family

by Muriel Kinson

WIRES was called to Richmond Hill where a young tawny frogmouth chick was found sitting on the ground, with its caring mum sitting on it, keeping it warm. Such a vulnerable position was obviously not good. Tawnies normally pick a nest site high in a fairly open large tree.

The chick was rescued by volunteer rescuer William, who contacted bird coordinator Jane. At the scene, the first substitute nest did not suit the tawny mum so a bit of ingenuity was called for. In the wild, tawnies' nests are a minimal flattish structure of sticks. Jane spotted a plastic seedling tray belonging to the member of the public, and this became the basis of the new nest. It was lined with sticks and then leaves were added so it wasn't too deep. A suitable tree was found that was sheltered by other trees but still easy for the tawnies to fly to.

Once the substitute nest was securely tied in the new position, the tawny chick was placed in it. All of this

activity was closely observed by the caring tawny parents. Even though it was daylight, a time when tawnies don't usually fly, the mother bird made her way in stages over to the new nest and sat on her baby. WIRES checked the next day and found mother bird sitting with her chick in the new nest while the father roosted nearby. A happy ending for all.



WIRES welcomes calls seeking information or reporting your sightings or experiences. We are an all-volunteer organisation and need more members in all parts of the Northern Rivers. There are many ways to help including rescues, fostering or manning the hotline service. Give us a call on the 24-hour hotline 6628-1898 to let us know what you can do to help. You can check out our website at: www.wiresnr.org

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