

Wattle time again

October 2005

It's wattle time again. This late-winter, early-spring season brings with it the familiar, and welcome, sight of many shades of yellow and gold brightening the bush and roadsides. One of the first to flower is the Varnish Wattle (*Acacia vernicflua*). There are many different wattles in flower at the moment, each with its own particular 'leaf' and flower arrangements. Although they all have undoubted beauty not all are welcome in our natural bushland.

Some, like the Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*), are garden escapees or have been planted and are now regarded as environmental weeds. In the Grampians the discussion about whether Sallow Wattle was present in pre-European days has been going on for a long time. The weight of evidence now suggests that it has been introduced and that it is spreading.

Like many wattles the seeds can lie in the ground for years before being awakened by the heat from a fire to germinate and rise to form dense thickets of seedlings. A good (or bad) example of this is the aftermath of the 1999 Mt Difficult fire. It is easy to track the path of the fire by following the occurrence of Sallow Wattle.

Recently a group of volunteers, in partnership with Parks Victoria, took part in a survey to map the extent and density of this plant in the northern sector of the Grampians National Park. This information will help management make plans to control the invader.

A smaller patch along the Grampians Road has obviously spread from a gravel pit used during the building of the road in the 1960s. Sallow Wattle was often used to revegetate such sites at that time, rather than using the indigenous (local) species. This patch has been the scene of a "weed pull" for three years and there are still many plants to be removed.

The Wannon Flora Reserve was the area chosen by the Hamilton Field Naturalists for an attack on the Sallow Wattle population there. There is no doubt that the weed is spreading from roadside plantings and is invading many of the open grassy areas. This reserve used to have a large variety, and numbers, of native ground orchids. Sad to say, this is no longer the case.

Other wattles can also behave as environmental weeds. Cootamundra Wattle (*Acacia baileyana*) has been planted throughout south-eastern Australia and is regarded as a pest plant in many parts of the region. Even the beautiful, much loved Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) can be a problem if it is allowed to grow where it did not originally belong. Keeping our remnant native vegetation weed-free is a continuing and increasing problem. We all share that responsibility. And please don't plant 'exotic' wattles like Sallow Wattle and Cootamundra Wattle in places where the seed can be spread into bushland or native grassland.

Photo

Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*)
– competing with Grampians
Thryptomene (*Thryptomene
calycina*)

