Significant Environmental Weeds in the Hamilton region of SW Victoria

Rod Bird

Environmental weeds can be placed in 3 categories:

- Introduced species (exotics) – often garden or pasture plants that have escaped
- Native Australian species not indigenous to the region
- Native species indigenous to the region

State and Federal governments have various categories for weeds:

- State Prohibited Weeds (SPW) – not widespread but a serious threat
- Regionally Prohibited Weeds (RPW) – widespread in some areas (possibly can be eradicated)
- Regionally Controlled Weeds (RCW) – widespread and important – control to check spread
- Restricted Weeds (RW) – serious threat in Australia – cannot be sold or traded in Vic
- Undeclared Weeds (UW) – recognized as a serious threat to agriculture & the environment
- Environmental Weeds (EW) – species recognized as a threat to the environment
- Weeds of National Significance (WNS) – a list of 20 species regarded as priority for action

Listed below are the plants that I consider to be the most serious environmental problems to the Hamilton area of SW Victoria.

Categories shown (e.g. EW) are from the GHCMA publication '*Weeds of the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment'.*

Introduced Species

1. *Alium triquetrum* Angled Onion – weed from dumped garden rubbish
2. *Asparagus asparagoides* Bridal Creeper – RW, WNS – garden escape, difficult to control
3. *Brassica napus* Canola/Rape – has invaded a fertile roadside and reserve site at Kanawalla
4. *Convolvulus arvensis* Bindweed – RW – a pest along streams
5. *Coprosma repens* Shiny Leaf – a problem on coastal areas
6. *Crataegus monogyna* Hawthorn –RW – can invade creek lines
7. *Cytisus scoparius* English Broom – RW
8. *Disa bracteata* African Weed Orchid – a new arrival in 2003, a major future problem
9. *Echium plantagineum* Paterson' Curse – RCW – a recent developing problem on woodlands
10. *Erica lusitanica* Spanish Heath – EW – can invade bushland
11. *Freesia refracta* Freesia – weed from dumped garden rubbish
12. *Fumaria capreolata* Whiteflower Fumitory – serious problem from dumped garden rubbish
13. *Galium aparine* Cleavers – a serious pest in bushland resulting from dumping garden rubbish
14. *Gazania ringens* Gazania – a serious problem, spreading along roadsides through the country
15. *Genista monspessulana* Cape Broom – RW – a problem in some areas
16. *Gladiolus cuspidatus* Wild Gladiolus – serious developing problem along stream reserves
17. *Hypericum perforatum* St John's Wort – RCW – a developing problem on roadsides, reserves
18. *Juncus acutus* Spiny Rush – RCW – a spiny invader of wet or saline flats
19. *Lycium ferocissimum* African Boxthorn – RCW – a ferocious pest in some areas
20. *Marrubium vulgare* Horehound – RCW – a problem on grasslands ,bushland, roadsides
21. *Moraea flaccida* Cape Tulip – RCW – almost impossible to eradicate from bushland
22. *Nassella neesiana* Chilean Needle Grass – WNS, RW – a problem in some grasslands
23. *Nassella trichotoma* Serrated Tussock – WNS – a problem in some grasslands
24. *Onopordum acanthium* Scotch Thistle – RCW – widespread prickly pest
25. *Oxalis pes-caprae* Soursob – another pest from dumped garden rubbish
26. *Oxalis purpurea* Purple Oxalis – serious weed on rail and road reserves
27. *Phalaris aquatic* Phalaris – a pasture grass that is a serious pest in native grasslands
28. *Pinus radiata* Monterey Pine – invades bushland
29. *Rosa rubiginosa* Briar Rose– RCW – insidious pest of roadsides, rail reserves
30. *Rubus fructicosus* Blackberry – RCW, WNS – invades stream banks and bushland
31. *Salix babylonica* Weeping Willow – RW – a problem on stream banks
32. *Sparaxis bulbifera* Harlequin Flower – EW – widespread weed of roadsides and reserves
33. *Thinopyrum ponticum* Tall Wheatgrass – a tall invasive pasture grass in wetland reserves

34. *Ulex europaeus* Gorse – RCW, WNS – a bad pest in some grassland areas
35. *Vinca major* Blue Periwinkle – EW – garden escape, difficult to eradicate
36. *Watsonia meriana* Wild Watsonia – RW – a bad weed of roadsides and damp areas

Native species not indigenous to the region

1. *Leptospermum laevigatum* Coastal Tea-tree – very invasive shrub of bushland
2. *Acacia baileyana* Cootamundra Wattle – an invasive tall shrub in bushland
3. *Pittosporum undulatum* Sweet Pittosporum – a very competitive, dominant tree
4. *Billardiera heterophylla* Australian Bluebell – a very invasive climber, hard to control
5. *Kunzea ericoides* Burgan – a very invasive dominant shrub, escaping from gardens

Native species indigenous to parts of the region

1. *Acacia longifolia* Coastal Wattle – very invasive coastal dominant spreading shrub
2. *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* Rosemary Grevillea – spreads from gardens along road reserves
3. *Acacia paradoxa* Hedge Wattle – can dominate nature reserves, excluding understorey

Observations

With the onset of climate change there appears to have been some change in the populations of certain weeds. Thus, 20 years ago I did not consider that the garden weeds Cleavers and Whiteflower Fumitory were a problem on the Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve . Now they are the worst weeds present and very difficult to eradicate. Despite more than 10 years of work (with several visits each year) there is little sign that the pests have been eliminated, despite herbicide spraying and/or hand-hoeing.

The impact of dumping of garden waste in bushland is clearly shown by one weed in the Mt Napier State Park. An infestation of *Galium aperine* (Cleavers) probably arose from garden rubbish dumped in the 1960s, has spread unchecked from the northern boundary entrance right through the park – a monumental advance! No doubt it was assisted by Kangaroos, Black Wallabies and feral goats.

*Brassica napu*s (Rape/Canola) is widely grown now and, at Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve, has shown that it will invade the roadside and reserve. The site is one that, in times past, had been where superphosphate spillage was said to have occurred from railway trucks in the station ground. The crop species has not so far invaded the infertile edges of the reserve that are distant from the infestation but that may be dependent on whether unharvested plants are present on the margins. Seed could then be shed into the reserve and may subsequently germinate. The possibility will be watched.

For various reasons, our focus on particular weeds will change. For example, African Weed Orchid entered our region in about 2002 and quickly established a significant presence. Despite controlling the weed on 6 ha of the Nigretta Flora Reserve from 2009 to 2025, there is no end in sight. Each year herbicide-wiping and/or digging was applied, treating 22,500 plants in 2009 and 1,400 plants in 2025. It is probably a battle that cannot be won – the hope was that there could in time be a development of natural controls.

Another example of changing focus is the control of Hedge Wattle in the Wannon Flora Reserve. This is considered by most to be a local species, although there is a suggestion that seed was introduced from (I think) Kangaroo Island to establish hedges in the 1880s. Whatever, this variant can grow to 6 or more metres in height, with a trunk at ground level of 25 cm – that is far larger than the shrub one encounters in other areas in SW Victoria. The shrubs had grown so thickly that they completely covered a large part of the reserve – too dense to walk through. It obliterated much of the heath understory in this Manna Gum woodland. Permission was obtained in 2020 to remove the shrub, hoping to salvage the original vegetation in this 18-acre reserve that had a flora list of 176 species. Whether that is possible remains to be seen, for the species produces a lot of seed that requires no treatment to germinate. Many thousands of seedlings have already been pulled.

There is, of course, a good case for having Hedge Wattle in our bushland reserves because of the protection it offers to many species of birds. That has to be weighed against the obvious damage it can do to the floristic and ecological integrity of that particular landscape. An ecological compromise may be to confine the species to large copses in the landscape and prevent it from spreading out.