



Weedbusters!

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In the thick of it

Wellington's Otari School hosted two special guests for the launch of the new Weedbusters children's book, "When the Jones Kids Came to Town."

Minister launches weedy read

Otari pupils welcomed the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, with songs performed by the whole school and a presentation from one pupil about organic gardening and companion planting.

When it was time for the Minister to read the new book to the school, however, he was rudely interrupted by the surprise appearance of the Weedbusters mascot, Woody Weed - typical behaviour for this troublesome invader!

Woody redeemed himself by giving out Weedbusters badges to the students, and even posed for a few photos with the Minister before joining staff for morning tea.



Photo: Dave Hansford

Toolkits help groups target weeds



Regional Weedbusters coordinators Anna Paltridge (DOC) and Gemma Bradfield (Environment Canterbury) demonstrate put Canterbury's new toolkit to good use.

Seven regions of New Zealand have now launched a special Weedbusters fund to help community groups with those little things that can make all the difference to the success of their weedbusting efforts: tools, herbicides, equipment hire and greenwaste disposal.

The funding is on a first-come, first-served basis rather than contestible, and is administered by the regional council and DOC regional Weedbusters coordinators in each participating area.

To help kick off these small-scale initiative funds, each participating region now has a toolkit that can be booked by Weedbusters groups for weeding bees.

Working together
to protect New Zealand

Bothersome bulbs and rampant rhizomes



Stinking iris (*Iris foetidissima*)



Montbretia (*Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora*)

Bulbs have fascinated gardeners for many centuries.

The Dutch nearly bankrupted themselves in the 1600s with the so-called 'tulip mania' that saw bulbs traded for exorbitant prices; the *fleur-de-lis* symbol that represents the French monarchy is based on the iris; crocus, hyacinth and narcissus are all named after gods in Greek mythology.

Maybe part of the appeal is that the growth habits of bulbs seem almost miraculous: an apparently dead bulb survives underground to come back to life in spring in larger numbers than the previous year.

Or maybe it's the ability of bulbous plants to survive in harsh conditions and inhospitable places; after all, most of them were originally domesticated from hardy specimens growing wild in the dry and stony ground of their countries of origin.

But the same traits that captivate us can also be a problem with the bulbous species that have gone 'weedy' and moved into natural areas.

The ability of bulbs to both set seed and spread to new areas, and then produce new bulbs to completely dominate these new areas, make them formidable species to keep under control!

Rhizomatous species - those that develop thick, root-like, underground stem systems that can become new plants - present similar problems when they turn up in the wild.

Because of the massive root structures rhizomatous and bulbous plants produce, they require either significant digging to safely remove them, or application of herbicides that are active enough to kill off the entire root system.

Any portions of the root system that are physically removed can survive out of the ground for a significant period of time - sometimes many months.

Gardeners can help by replacing weedy species with ones that don't invade natural areas, or deadheading these species to stop them seeding. They can also ensure that the bulbs or rhizomes of any weedy species they remove, along with mature seedheads, are disposed of at a refuse transfer station to prevent reinfestations.

Fast facts

Bulbs are underground food storage structures.

Rhizomes are underground stems that can produce new plants.

Is wild ginger the worst of the lot?

You often smell wild ginger before you see it - a strong, sweet fragrance that was one of the reasons that gardeners cultivated it in the first place.

This striking garden beauty, however, is a wild beast when it gets into natural areas. Different wild ginger species have shown their true colours in several countries where they have been introduced, with Hawaii and the northern areas of New Zealand having major problems with this invader.

There are two varieties of ornamental ginger that have gone wild in New Zealand: kahili (red) ginger (*Hedychium gardnerianum*) and yellow ginger (*H. flavescens*). Another invasive white ginger (*H. coronarium*) that plagues Hawaii has not yet been found wild here.

While kahili ginger spreads both by rhizomes and by seed that is carried by birds, yellow ginger is only spread by rhizomes. Both species can develop dense rhizome mats that extend up to a metre below the ground, dominating the area so completely that native seedlings can't get a foothold amongst the infestation.

Wild ginger is probably the most frightening example of when good plants go bad. If unchecked, whole forests may be put at risk through the loss of native understorey that would normally replace aging canopy trees over time.

Fast fact

Despite their names, Kahili ginger, yellow ginger and white ginger are not edible.



Kahili ginger flowerhead. Photo: Tim Senior.



In the thick of it...

Last year, hubby and I took on what seems to have become the new kiwi dream - a small block in the country. Part of the reason we bought it was the backdrop of a gorgeous DOC-owned kahikatea remnant.

There is a small group of volunteers already weedbusting in this remnant. These volunteers mostly come from the nearby city to do this work on their weekends; they have only managed to entice one adjoining neighbour to take part, despite the weed infestations originally having come from neighbouring properties.

One of the problems, it seems, is that those moving to lifestyle blocks from town are taking their weedy garden plants with them - presumably because they are 'fast growing' and will make the greatest impact on bare land in the shortest time.

One of the jobs hubby and I will be tackling over the coming year is planning our gardens and planting our specimen trees. We are determined to ensure that the trees we plant won't end up invading and causing damage in neighbouring blocks, riparian plantings, and bush remnants.

Banned from our block will be all the usual nasties, as well as sycamores, ornamental cherries, acacias, willows, and holly, to be on the safe side. We're leaving non-native palms out of the equation too, although I see they are the first thing a lifestyle 'estate' being prepared for subdivision down the road has planted!

We're also planting a quarter of an acre just in natives. In ten years time we'd like to be able to know that, not only have we not contributed to the weed problems in our area, we have also increased the total area of native bush that native birds in our area can call home.

That would be something you could really feel good about, I reckon.

Carolyn Lewis
National Weedbusters Coordinator

Wanganui Weedbusters write

The new Youth Environmental Students (YES) programme kicked off in the Manawatu and Rangitikei with 20 students from six different secondary schools spending a day helping eradicate the weed pink ragwort (*Senecio glastifolius*) from a local beach reserve.

The activity is the first the students will take part in to develop their awareness of local environmental issues. With a range of agencies in the management group - Horizons Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Massey University College of Education, secondary school teachers, Palmerston North City Council, Manawatu District Council and Environment Network Manawatu - the activities will be varied and focus on different aspects of the environment.



Yohan Huria, one of the YES students from Hato Paora College near Feilding. Photo: Jo Greig, DOC

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One good tern deserves another

Twenty-four volunteers have kicked off an ongoing weedbusting effort to help clear exotic vegetation from the Wairau River to create better areas for endangered black-fronted terns to breed.

Wairau River is one of the last habitats for the terns, but invasive weeds have been overwhelming their breeding areas.

A special Weedbusters working bee last month involved Picton Weedbusters, Marlborough District Council, DOC and interested locals.

Conditions were far from ideal, with a few hail stones and blustery showers, along with wind so strong that the silt from the river stuck in everyone's teeth!

Despite the inclement weather, the weeding bee exceeded expectation, with the original target area cleared within an hour, and the entire island cleared of weeds by the end of the day.

Weedy species removed included broom, lupin and Californian poppy.

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Wanganui Weedbusters write

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Understanding the social and economic implications of environmental issues will be a key feature, and valuable networking between the students will assist them in gaining skills to become involved in environmental action in their own schools. The students themselves will work together to set and achieve their own goals for the forum.

Twenty-six International Pacific College (IPC) environmental students also joined the group on their first event at Tawhiriho Scientific Reserve, Tangimoana. It providing an excellent opportunity for the YES students to work alongside other cultures and discuss global environmental issues.

- Kay Davies, DOC



Want to win a \$50 Gardening New Zealand voucher?

To go into the monthly draw to win a \$50 Gardening New Zealand voucher, enter the 'Name This Weed' competition at

www.weedbusters.org.nz



German ivy
(*Senecio mikanoides*)



Palm grass
(*Setaria palmifolia*)



Asiatic knotweed
(*Reynoutria japonica*)



Tree lupin
(*Lupinus arboreus*)

One good tern deserves another

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While it's too early to see if the terns would utilise the area that had been cleared, DOC staff are optimistic as the birds are starting to show mating behaviour. The island was selected as it's in an area where the birds have previously nested.

The breeding success rate for the birds on islands increases to 60%, compared with 40% success rates for nesting attempts on land that is not isolated by water.

More volunteer events are likely to be held in the future to keep the island free of exotic vegetation for future breeding years.

- Claire Woolridge-Way, DOC



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