



Weedbusters!

www.weedbusters.org.nz

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In this issue:

Wild and weedy trees

How BIG do weedy trees get?

40 years of 'Aborta Contorta'-ing

In the thick of it

Auckland Weedbusters write

World Wetlands Day

Working together

to protect New Zealand

Woody Weed recently took time out from his busy schedule of appearances to compete in New Zealand's first Mascot Race at Otorohanga's Kiwiana Festival.

Weedbusters the winner on the day

The race field turned out to be a mixed bag, with Reuben the Road Safety Bear, Harold the Life Education Trust Giraffe, and two rugby mascots among the 11 contenders.

Wiki the Otorohanga kiwi and Buzzy Bee were early casualties of a mid-field collision that saw them limp in last equal. Woody finished a respectable third behind Iron Brion and the Mooloo cow.

Woody Weed startled the crowd with a surprising turn of speed, a chilling reminder of how fast weeds can move when they find themselves in the right conditions.



Photo: Carolyn Lewis

Kimbolton's walk on the wild side

The kids from Kimbolton School aren't letting the weeds grow under their feet. Since 2003, with the support of Manawatu District Council, they've been clearing tradescantia and thistles out of a bush remnant near the school, and with the help of parents, will soon be tackling elderberry and a few red cestrum patches that have established.



Photo: Anywl Minaar

This piece of bush is now used as an extended classroom by Kimbolton School for data collection, research and projects. To spread the word about keeping bush remnants free of weeds, the students have been conducting guided tours through the bush for Cheltenham School pupils, Waituna West Environmental Club, Kiwi Conservation Club, and their own school senior class and parents.

Extensive flood and snowstorm damage last year opened some areas of the bush up, leading to an influx of weeds, but the kids of Kimbolton School are not discouraged; they are planning a big weeding session to get things back on track so that they can continue to share this precious piece of bush with others in the area.

Wild and weedy trees

If you think that weeds can't get very big, have a look at the green box to the right. Some of our worst weeds grow to amazing heights and can live for a very long time.

Different weedy trees cause problems in different areas of New Zealand. While willows (*Salix* spp.) wreck wetlands and clog waterways all over the country, Italian buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*) is a particular curse around Auckland's offshore islands such as Waiheke.

Woolly nightshade (*Solanum mauritianum*) is a problem in northern parts of the North Island, and wilding pines (*Pinus* spp.) threaten to take over large areas of both the North and the South Islands. There is even an invasive rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) that is being controlled in the central North Island.

Because of their size, weedy trees can be hard to get rid of. They are so large that felling them can cause damage to the plants around them; they will often regrow from cut stumps or fallen branches.

To avoid some of these problems, weedy trees can often be 'killed standing' by injecting them with herbicide. If the trees need to be removed for aesthetic or safety reasons, they can be cut off at ground level and their fresh stumps treated with herbicide to prevent regrowth.

Of course, there is another solution: pull out the weedy trees when they are seedlings so that they never get big enough to become weedy trees. It's the cheapest and easiest approach in the long run.

How **BIG** do weedy trees grow?

A single storey house in New Zealand is around 5m from groundlevel to the rooftop.

Weedy trees that can grow at least as tall as this include brush cherry (*Syzygium australe*), brush wattle (*Paraserianthes lophantha*), japanese spindletree (*Euonymus japonicus*), Italian buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*), woolly nightshade (*Solanum mauritianum*) and purple guava (*Psidium cattleianum*).

Even bigger weedy trees include poplars (*Populus* spp.), willows (*Salix* spp.), monkey apple (*Acmena smithii*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), and tree privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*).

40 years of 'Aborta Contorta'-ing

Lodgepole pine, or cortorta, (*Pinus contorta*) was introduced into New Zealand in the 1920s to produce a timber crop in cold areas. It was planted extensively around the South Island, and also in the central plateau area of the North Island, bordering onto what is now the Tongariro National Park and World Heritage Area.

Over time, contorta fell out of favour as *Pinus radiata* was found to grow faster and produce a better quality wood. By this stage, however, contorta had well and truly

established in the area, spreading by wind-borne seed as far as 12 kilometres from the parent plants. These seedlings ended up in the national park areas, changing the look of the landscape dramatically and outcompeting the native species.

The 1960s saw the start of the 'Aborta Contorta' scheme to remove these invading pines, with groups of volunteers and DOC staff felling contorta trees and pulling up seedlings on weekend weeding bees. This work continues on a three-year cycle to this day.

This year, Wanganui Tramping Club celebrates 40 years of 'Aborta Contorta'-ing in the central North Island. They and other tramping clubs, Forest and Bird branches, and numerous individual volunteers and DOC staff have played a key role in stopping the relentless march of contorta across one of New Zealand's iconic landscapes.



Wilding pines invading South Island high country
Photo: Environment Canterbury



In the thick of it...

At the Weedbusters stand at the recent EnviroSchools Expo in Hamilton, I was amazed to hear children as young as eight tell the activity leader what a weed was. Even at that young age, they knew that a weed was a bad plant that can damage 'good plants', that weeds cause problems in the environment, and some even knew that many of our weeds have escaped from gardens.

This issue of *Weedbusters* also has two great examples of schools getting involved in weedbusting efforts. It shows that you are never too young to do your bit to protect the environment from the damage caused by weeds.

Overall, it's been a very busy summer for Weedbusters and shows no signs of slowing down as the weather gets colder. There are some major shows still to come over winter, and events around the country for the next few months are already being planned.

Amber Bill, the previous national coordinator, described Weedbusters as a 'controlled snowball effect' that would gradually build up momentum as it went along. Her predictions are coming true, and the trick now is to keep Weedbusters moving in the right direction as it grows in size and impact, and as more people become involved in weedbusting activities.

So spread the word about Weedbusters and get friends and family involved in a project in your area. What a great way to get fit, have fun and do something good for your environment!

Carolyn Lewis
Acting National
Weedbusters Coordinator

Auckland Weedbusters write...

The last few months have been busy for Auckland Weedbusters. We've been at a number of shows, including Ellerslie Flower Show, the Kumeu and Helensville A&P Shows, Ambury Farm Day and Omana Children's Day. Woody Weed has been busy too, turning up at a number of these events.

Woody was also present at the Kiwi Icon Day, held at Auckland Zoo on Waitangi Day to celebrate New Zealand's native flora and fauna, and the efforts the different agencies are putting into protecting them.

DOC, the Auckland Regional Council, MAF, Ark in the Park and Forest and Bird were all there.

Children at the event were given "New Zealand" passports as they entered, with questions about each organisation's displays which were spread in a trail around the zoo. Completed passports went into a draw to win a family trip out on a release with the Kiwi Recovery Programme.



Photo: Ted Scott, Photofile Int. Ltd

A young fan meets Woody Weed at the Omana Children's Day

cont'd on page 4

World Wetlands Day 2005

World Wetlands Day 2005 was celebrated in Queenstown with a weeding bee at Gorge Road Wetland, the closest easily accessible wetland to Queenstown, and the only urban wetland in Wakatipu.

A group of volunteers from the community, along with Queenstown Lakes District Council and DOC staff, worked at the reserve for the day. A range of commercial operators also helped out by donating staff time and equipment. Willows were a prime target and were controlled by drilling and poisoning; other weeds were pulled from the banks to tidy up the area.

Ongoing weed work is planned in the wetland to open it up and to protect the biodiversity in this increasingly important area.



Photo: Sarah Boyle

At the other end of the country, a group of around 90 senior students and their teachers from Muriwai and Manutuke Schools joined Sarah Boyle, Gisborne's Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinator, and others for a fun-packed field day at Wherowhero Lagoon.

After discussions about some of the native plants and animals found in the lagoon and the problems that weeds can cause for native New Zealand species, the students got involved in some hands-on learning activities.

Their efforts were rewarded with beautiful native trees and Weedbusters badges. The day finished with a collective weeding around the native plantings in this stunning wetland area.



Photo: Bronwyn Young

Auckland Weedbusters write (cont'd)

Weedbusters also had a popular display at BioBlitz, an event organised by Landcare Research and held in the Auckland Domain, where all flora and fauna found at Auckland Domain over a 24-hour period were recorded. Nearly 1100 different species – including one new invasive grass species right outside the BioBlitz tent! – were found.

A number of existing weedbusting groups and organisations in the Auckland area have been registering via the website, including the Motutapu Restoration Trust, Motuihe Retoration Trust, Kaipatiki Ecological Restoration Trust and Karekare Landcare.

Weedbusters was also involved with a Helensville Eco-care training day for groups and the community, with workshops on weed identification and control, as well as forest monitoring, predator control, stream care and setting up a mainland island.

The next few months also look busy for Auckland Weedbusters, with more shows coming up, as well as a major campaign by the Auckland Regional Council as part of "The Big Clean Up" which will focus on the top weeds around the region, with plant give-aways, school competitions and displays. We also hope to hold our first Weedbusters Awards as part of this event, so watch this space.

Happy Weedbusting, everyone!

Mike Harre
Auckland Weedbusters coordinator

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

You can go in the monthly draw to win a \$50 Gardening New Zealand voucher.

Simply enter the 'Name This Weed' competition on

www.weedbusters.org.nz



Moth plant
(*Araujia sericifera*)



Alligator weed
(*Alternanthera philoxeroides*)



Blackberry
(*Rubus fruticosus* agg.)



Chilean flame creeper
(*Tropaeolum speciosum*)

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