

Issue 2
January 2005



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Introducing Phil

Phil Rowe represents the Australian *Rubus* Growers Association (ARGA) on the National Blackberry Taskforce. Currently he is ARGA’s secretary. Phil has been growing berries (along with several crops from orchard trees) for 24 years. He is an organic grower (certified since 1988) in Gippsland, Victoria. As a member of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASSAA) he has been the Chairman of the Inspection Review Committee for the past twelve years. He has a Bachelor of Science (focussing on microbiology) from Monash University, Melbourne. Phil’s *Rubus* collection includes commercially viable loganberries and red currants; as well as rare heritage varieties.

At a glance:

- Phil’s our man.
- CSIRO working hard to spread the biocontrol rust.
- WA’s blackberry boundaries pushed back.
- Be quick. Envirofund Round 6 applications now due.



Above: Phil Rowe, standing in front of a row of “Chester” *Rubus* berries.



Natural Heritage Trust

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CSIRO gets rustier

Additional rust strains released in Australia for biological control of weedy blackberries.

The rust fungus called *Phragmidium violaceum* has been in Australia since 1984, and has been shown to be efficient in reducing populations of weedy blackberry in some areas. In early 2004, Biosecurity Australia approved the importation of additional strains of the rust fungus that had been selected in Europe and demonstrated to be virulent on the weedy blackberry present in Australia, but safe towards non-target native and commercially grown *Rubus* species. A few experimental sites in Western Australia and New South Wales were chosen to release the additional rust strains in either autumn or spring 2004. Results from this work will help to determine the best season for large-scale rust releases in order to increase their chance of establishment.

Three sites in the Tumut-Tumbarumba region of NSW (Blowering Dam, Hardys Mill, Pound Creek), and two sites in the Manjimup region of WA (Lefroy Brook and Rory Dean) were selected for the releases. Permanent transect lines were set up at each of the sites to enable future monitoring of changes in blackberry biomass. Initial data of the blackberry population, and other vegetation, at each site was recorded in March-April 2004. The currently occurring population of *P. violaceum* at the experimental sites was also sampled before the release of the new rust strains.

The eight new European rust strains, and the F15 strain (which was introduced in the 1990s but most likely failed to establish), were released simultaneously on 6-7 April, 2004 at the Blowering Dam, Pound Creek and Lefroy Brook sites, by placing infected potted plants near the infestation, and also directly spraying the field plants with rust spores. In early May, collaborators visited the Pound Creek site and confirmed the rust's presence on inoculated field plants. Successful infection of the inoculated blackberry leaves was also confirmed seven weeks later during a visit to the Lefroy Brook site. No rust infection was observed on young leaves of surrounding blackberry canes that were not artificially inoculated.

A molecular technique, recently developed at the University of Adelaide, was explored as a possible way to identify the different rust strains of *P. violaceum*, as they can not be distinguished from each other by physical characters. Correct identification is important to determine the fate of the new rust strains released in a background of established populations of other strain(s) of the rust fungus. Unfortunately this technique could not be successfully transferred and adapted to CSIRO laboratory conditions and equipment within the timeframe of the funding obtained in 2003-04. This funding came from the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). We are now considering our options, and will explore other avenues to differentiate the new European strains from each other, and from the existing populations of *P. violaceum* in Australia.

The work is continuing in 2004-05 with funding assistance from the Western Australian Department of Agriculture, the Riverina Highlands Weed Working Group in NSW, and NHT via DAFF. Spring releases were performed in October-November 2004 and sampling of sites is underway to determine whether rust establishment has occurred.

Prepared by Dr Louise Morin,
CSIRO Entomology, Canberra.

ACT, CSIRO, NSW, Vic, and WA are all working on blackberry rust research.

Congratulations from the National Blackberry Taskforce to all those involved in these programs - especially to all the wonderful volunteers!



Success In The Wild West

The Western Australian community around the Porongurup National Park, near Albany, was involved in a successful blackberry management program. They were primarily financially supported by the Natural Heritage Trust (through the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (Western Australia) and the Department of Conservation and Land Management team.

The Porongurup National Park is at the boundary of weedy blackberry infestations in WA. The Albany region is known worldwide for its wildflowers. One of the main aims of the project was to push back the outer limits of blackberries in southern WA, and allow native flora to regenerate in the National Park. Blackberries both in and around the National Park were treated. Treatment was extended out from the National Park in order to reduce re-infestation by birds flying overhead scattering viable seed and plant matter from the weeds.

Global Positioning Systems locations of blackberry treatment areas were compared with known locations of endangered species to avoid any detrimental effects before any weed treatments. The reduction in blackberry infestations has reduced the risk to the local endemic flora and fauna being negatively affected. Following treatments regrowth of local flora has been observed in and around the Porongurups.

As well as on-ground blackberry reductions, an informative and helpful farmnote was produced. This was widely distributed throughout the local area, and made available on the Department's website (www.agric.wa.gov.au). The program managers also contacted all local landholders with blackberry infestations and conducted training on the management of blackberry, use of sprayers and selection of herbicides best suited to the particular infestation. Herbicides were supplied to landholders with small infestations, and professional spraying equipment loaned to those with larger areas. This combination of the landowner providing the labour, and the project supplying the initial herbicide, sprayers and training has been very effective. Most landowners have continued treating the remnant blackberry, because they have invested their time into the initial control. This process encouraged a far higher rate of blackberry awareness and action in the region.

NHT support for important on-ground blackberry control in southern WA.

Regrowth of local flora seen after the blackberry management in and around the Porongurups.



Above: Albany Kayak Club enjoying a well earned BBQ after several hours paddling, mapping river bank blackberries.

National Blackberry Co-ordinator,
Ms Sarah Keel,

PO Box 48,
FRANKSTON, 3199.
Phone: (03) 9785 0111
Fax: (03) 9785 2007
sarah.keel@dpi.vic.gov.au

Natural Heritage Trust Funds

Australian Government Envirofund

Community groups and individuals may gain access to small, individual grants through the Australian Government Envirofund. These grants will provide up to \$30,000 (GST inclusive) to carry out on-ground, and other actions, to target local problems. Grants of up to \$50,000 (GST inclusive) may be considered where the magnitude, complexity or public benefit of the project is such that additional funding would be beneficial.

This component of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is aimed, in particular, at groups that have had little, or no, previous engagement with the NHT. Round 6 of the Envirofund is now open. **Applications for Round 6 close at 5pm on Friday, 18 February, 2005.**

National Competitive Component, Round 2

Incorporated organisations may be able to apply for funding through this round of NHT funding. **Applications for this component also close at 5pm on Friday, 18 February, 2005.**

Regional Competitive Component, Round 3

Integrated natural resource management regional organisations recognised by the NHT should apply through this round under the "Threatened Species" theme. **Applications for this component close at 5pm on Friday, 4 March, 2005.**

These are highly subscribed components, so please read the selection criteria carefully. For more info' on all NHT grants, application forms, selection criteria, and application guides go to the national NHT website (www.nht.gov.au). Additional funding for weeding activities should be announced soon – keep your eyes open!

Make sure your application is received on time, is complete and includes all signatures, maps and attachments.

If your group is planning to submit an application to the Natural Heritage Trust for blackberry management, please let the National Blackberry Taskforce know (that way we may provide you with a Letter of Support).

"Blackberry bites:"

- **NHT funding applications are due NOW.**
- **Next NBT meeting in SA in March.**

Disclaimer: *This newsletter is for interest only. The National Blackberry Taskforce, and National Blackberry Co-ordinator disclaim all liability for any loss or damage as a result of depending on the information herein. Please check with your appropriate local officers before using any information.*

We're on the Web!

You can access this newsletter (as well as the WoNS National Blackberry Strategic Plan, and information for all the other WoNS) on the Weeds Australia website:

www.weeds.org.au