

VBTnews

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

INVASIVE SPECIES FORUM: WHITTLESEA

Over 40 people attended the Whittlesea Invasive Species forum held in Whittlesea on the 18th May. The event was co-hosted by the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group (WASBAG) and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT).

The Invasive Species Forum provided an opportunity for delegates to listen to speakers and discuss ideas to improve invasive species management. Topics included blackberry biocontrol, projected deer populations and support programs managed by the WASBAG, City of Whittlesea and Melbourne Water.

Following the presentations, participants at the workshop discussed what was working, what needed improving and opportunities to get better results on ground. Discussion points concentrated around collaboration, education, resources and engagement.

Melbourne Water and the City of Whittlesea were viewed positively in the way they influence and resource the community. Their respective programs, such as the City of Whittlesea's Roadside Pest Program and Melbourne Water's River Health Initiative Program have provided real impetus and assistance to landholders in the Whittlesea region.

There was consensus amongst delegates that grass roots action was successful, and the



WHITTLESEA INVASIVE SPECIES FORUM PRESENTATION

WASBAG's first year partnering with the VBT was a good example of this.

Current engagement techniques in the Whittlesea community have provided good results, including the use of newsletters, school programs, workshops and information days. There were suggestions that this could be improved by targeting engagement activities at the younger generation and new landholders in the region.

Technology was seen as an important factor in improving invasive species management. An immediate action from the workshop was to hold a demonstration day of practical control techniques including the use of drone technology. This was hosted by the VBT and WASBAG on the 6th October at Eden Park.

Two more invasive species forums are planned before the end of February 2019 which will provide an opportunity for two more communities to be better informed when making decisions for future invasive species management.

Blackberryaction



MULCHER - CCGBAG DEMONSTRATION DAY

CREIGHTONS CREEK-GOORAM BLACKBERRY ACTION CREEK GROUP

The Creightons Creek-Gooram Blackberry Action Group (CCGBAG) has completed a successful second year funded by the VBT Partnership Program.

The group, which is made up of Creightons Creek and Gooram landholder/community representatives, has a clear plan in place for the future. Increasing the awareness of land managers about blackberry control and the associated responsibilities, providing reliable guidance in practical aspects of blackberry control and recruiting new participants to the program, are the main objectives.

In the second year, the group's project officer visited 35 landholders encompassing 4,450 hectares which resulted in the recruitment of 14 new landholders to the program. Since the program's inception, 29 new landholders have signed up to the program.



NEW DRONE TECHNOLOGY FOR APPLYING HERBICIDES



WHITTLESEA BLACKBERRY CONTROL FIELD DAY

The VBT and the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group held a successful field day at Eden Park on 6 October. Land managers from Whittlesea and further afield watch a demonstration of a mulcher in operation on the canes of blackberry sprayed last year.

While these were dry canes the use of the mulcher on green blackberry would be cost effective in large infestations by reducing the biomass and the amount of herbicide needed the following year on the regrowth.

A highlight of the day was a demonstration of new drone technology for applying herbicide where ground base access is restricted. It can also be used on flat land to speed up the application process. The attendees were able to see the ease of take off and landing in a small area and understand the practical limitations of the technology.



NEW GROUP: Mount Worth (West Strzelecki Blackberry Action Group)

The West Strzelecki Blackberry Action Group's (WSBAG) target area has landholders undertaking a variety of enterprises who will receive visits from the WSBAG project officer. Information will be provided on responsibilities to control noxious weeds with a focus on blackberry.

The WSBAG will begin their first year with the VBT, funded by the Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits Project. The Steering Committee comprises members from the Mount Worth and Triholm district and will target two areas. The first around the locations of Seaview, Tetoora Road and Mountain View and the second, around the locations of Strzelecki and Ferndale. Both regions have had a long history of established weed issues including blackberry and ragwort.

The group understand some of the reasons why landholders have noxious weed issues on their property. They include changing demographics, reduced physical



capacity and also limited knowledge on best practice control techniques. Some landholders are operating organic businesses and may not be adequately controlling their weeds using chemical free techniques.

In the first year, the group's project officer will endeavour to sign 20 landholders to a voluntary management agreement.

Whittlesea Case Study PERI-URBAN



PAM PHOENIX

THE WHITTLESEA AND SURROUNDS BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP (WASBAG) WAS THE FOCUS OF A CASE STUDY IN MAY.

The interview focused on how the group was formed and investigated what the affect or impact it is having on the community. Twenty-nine people to date have signed voluntary management agreements for blackberry control.

Participants in the case study included WASBAG president Peter Rutely, City of Whittlesea's Environment Officer, Katherine Whittaker and program participant Pam Phoenix.

Pam Phoenix has owned the 'Humevale' property since 1978 where fires destroyed her house and garden in 2009. This event caused 'blackberry to go berserk' according to Pam. Pam has really benefited from interaction with the WASBAG's project officer who has mapped her blackberry and provided support along the way.

The group began as a result of the City of Whittlesea contacting the VBT to attend a Weeds Information day at Wollert in 2016. There was community interest in starting a blackberry group and after holding a public meeting and planning session, WASBAG was formed. The VBT worked closely with the council staff in this time who assisted with the public meetings and planning session and continues providing administrative support for the group. The WASBAG program will continue this year focusing on follow-up visits and recruitment of new landholders.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Diagnostic Tool Developed for Purple Blotch Disease (PBD)

A Victorian Blackberry Taskforce project funded by the Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits project, has successfully produced a diagnostic tool for purple blotch disease (PBD) Septocytia detection.

Septocytia are diseases which affect rubus plants such as berry fruits. Previously, if septocytia was detected in a commercial berry farm there was no way of quickly identifying the strain.

It is important that identification is timely as one strain, septocytia rubrorum, which is not known to be in Australia, will cause the death of the plant.

The next step will be to engage with rubus growers to inform them of the application of this technology on commercial crops.



DR ROBIN ADAIR

New YouTube video and Community Service Announcement

Dr Robin Adair, VBT committee member, has featured in two short film productions to educate the Victorian community on the biology and long-term control of blackberry. The five-minute video and half minute community service announcement focuses on the unique biology of the woody weed, including the large root system and the many ways blackberry regenerates and spreads. Robin links this biology to the steps required for the successful long-term control of blackberry.

The community service announcement will air on major television stations in Victoria starting in October 2018 and the video can be viewed on the VBT's YouTube channel - www.youtube.com/channel/UC9zbSO_ezSxIAfho6lF9PnQ

Another potential blackberry biocontrol?

While purple blotch disease remains a potential biocontrol for blackberry, the research by the CSIRO into phytophthora affecting blackberry in Western Australia has been terminated as it was shown to be non-specific to blackberry. A disappointing development in the search for another tool in blackberry control.

However the Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group (M2M), which has advocated/lobbied for more resources into blackberry biocontrol, has produced a video clip focusing on a project led by Agriculture Victoria's Senior Research Scientist of Pests and Diseases, Raelene Kwong. This project was made possible through residual funds from the phytophthora research project. Raelene and her team travelled to Portugal and the United Kingdom to collect samples of the black sawfly *Phylloecus faunus* which attacks the blackberry cane. This potential agent was identified 30 years ago, but there were concerns it was not host specific.

The feasibility study sought to assess the sawfly in its natural environment of Western Europe to see if it could be found in closely-related plants, particularly *Rosa canina* (dog rose). The study found no evidence of sawfly in these plants.

However, a second natural enemy was found attacking blackberry in Europe. This particular beetle attacks the crown and lower canes. According to Raelene, more rigorous research is required, but these two natural enemies are worth investigating further. To view the video, use the link provided below.

www.necma.vic.gov.au/News-Events/News/ArtMID/431/ArticleID/430/Video-Mitta-to-Murray-Blackberry-Action-Group



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