

African daisy, *Senecio pterophorus*

FACT SHEET | DECEMBER 2014



WHAT IS IT?

African daisy, *Senecio pterophorus* is an erect, tufted, perennial shrub 1–1.5 m high.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Stem

African daisy has several stems per plant. The stems are greyish-green and ribbed length-wise. The lower parts of the stems develop distinctive wings which extend down from the bases of the leaves.

Leaves

The leaves are leathery and lance-shaped, 5–14 cm long and 3–25 mm wide. The lower leaves have 2–8 forward-directed teeth and the upper leaves are generally without teeth. The upper

Above: African daisy bush.

Right: African daisy stem and seeds.

surface of the leaf is glossy-green, and the lower leaf is white or grey with a cobweb-like appearance.

Flowers

The flower heads are generally 10–20 cm across, with 40–200 or more individual flowers.

HISTORY

African daisy is thought to have been introduced to South Australia in ship ballast at Port Lincoln around 1930. From there it spread to the Adelaide Hills and occupied much of the southern Eyre Peninsula and south-east South Australia in areas with over 500 mm annual rainfall. It is native to high rainfall districts of South Africa.

African daisy has been present on Kangaroo Island from at least the 1950s and was a significant weed as soldier settler blocks were cleared. As pastures were established on the cleared ground the weed disappeared. Since then African daisy has been virtually absent from the region.

In the past two seasons African daisy has become well established on one harvested plantation forestry block, which is now in the process of being converted back to pasture.

Over this same period isolated plants have also been detected across the Island from the Hundreds of Gosse, Duncan, Cassini, Seddon, Menzies, MacGillivray, Haines and Dudley.

A likely explanation for this unexpected re-emergence of African daisy is the wet conditions



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experienced in recent seasons and in the case of the forestry block, the large scale disturbance created by the timber harvesting. The widespread records indicate that African daisy seed was already present in the soil across the region and that germination was triggered by local disturbance.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

African daisy is a pioneer plant, which invades sites that have undergone disturbance such as clearing, soil degradation or fire. It can outcompete other plants and become dominant. In agricultural areas heavy losses in productivity can result but are rarely seen because it is easy to control. African daisy contains toxic alkaloids but no stock deaths have been reported in Australia. In native vegetation the plant is a strong competitor, forming dense thickets that exclude native species.

There are two situations where the presence of a large African daisy seed bank could cause impacts on Kangaroo Island. They are:

- » preventing the regeneration of native vegetation after fire
- » increasing the costs of converting forestry plantations back into a conditions suitable for other primary production uses.

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

African daisy will tolerate a wide range of soil types and conditions and prefers moderate to high rainfall areas 500-1500 mm. It prefers disturbed ground commonly found on roadsides, forestry plantations and recently burnt ground.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

African daisy reproduces by seed. Seeds mainly fall close the parent plant. Some seeds can be transported long distance by wind if the seed is not detached from its outer shell. Long Distance dispersal is more likely to occur through movement of water, animals, vehicles and contaminated soil and produce.

HOW DO WE CONTROL IT?

The presence of a significant infestation in the region and its inevitable spread onto adjoining roadsides has once again raised concerns about this weed and the impacts it could have on Kangaroo Island.

African daisy, while it appears to be highly invasive does not persist for any length of time and if left unmanaged creates conditions unsuitable for itself until further disturbance. No other region in South Australia currently has a program focussing on the management of this weed. There are no legislative obligations to control African daisy.

African daisy management in the region will focus on two targets:

1. prevent the weed becoming wide spread and problematic in forestry plantations post-harvest
2. prevent the weed impacting on native vegetation post-fire and other broad scale disturbances.

This will be achieved by:

- » land holders familiarising themselves with African daisy at all growth stages
- » land holders treating or reporting new infestations
- » new infestations being located and treated before setting seed
- » containing the spread around existing infestations.

Control options are:

- » broad acre spraying or cultivation and pasture establishment on arable land
- » 'crash' grazing seedlings using sheep in steep or rough country
- » hand pulling individual plants
- » spot spraying the entire plant to the point of runoff with Glyphosate 360 g/L at 1ml/1 L of water, plus an organosilicone penetrant at 1ml/1 L of water for large established plants
- » or cut and painting by applying the mixture to the stump of the plant as soon as it has been cut down with Glyphosate 360 g/L at a ratio of 1:5 with water.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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