



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

AFRICAN BOXTHORN



Closeup of leaves, flowers and thorns



Closeup of fruit



A large African boxthorn

AFRICAN BOXTHORN



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African boxthorn, *Lycium ferocissimum*, is a large perennial shrub introduced from southern Africa. Boxthorns were originally planted in Australia as hedges to provide shelter from the wind and barriers to stock movement. The weed has spread into pastures from these hedges.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- common in coastal environments
Northern pastoral	- very common along water courses
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- widespread, especially on coastal areas and watercourses
Murray Mallee	- widespread
South East	- isolated plants with heavier infestations in the south
Central region	- widespread in the northern and coastal areas

Impacts

Where neglected the thorny bushes will form dense impenetrable thickets. The plant becomes a nuisance along fences, creeks, floodouts and around dams and leaking troughs where it blocks passage along roads and prevents stock access to watering points. Boxthorns also provide excellent harbour for vertebrate pests such as foxes and rabbits. Due to the sharp spines, boxthorns are not grazed heavily by stock and therefore replace desirable pasture plants. They also invade native vegetation after disturbance.

Recognition

African boxthorn is an erect, deep-rooted shrub growing to 5m high and 3m across. The densely tangled twigs end in spines that can reach 8cm long. Leaves are oval, 3.5cm long and 2cm wide, light green and fleshy in texture. Flowers are white with purple dots and about 1cm in diameter, with five small petals and stamens hanging downwards. They are followed by round orange-red berries 5 to 10 mm diameter, each containing 30 to 70 irregular seeds. Boxthorn has an extensive, deep and branched root system that can produce sucker shoots if broken.

Biology

Boxthorn seeds germinate at any time of the year and seedlings are competitive with other shrub species. Plants can start to flower at 2 years old and bear mainly fruit in summer, but flowering and fruiting can occur throughout the year. Plants are sometimes deciduous in winter or during drought; if so, new leaves appear in spring or after rain.

Seeds are the only method of reproduction of boxthorn and are carried by birds and mammals that eat the fruits. Seeds may also be moved by flood waters and in contaminated soil or produce.

Further Information:

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd edn. Inkata Press.

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For more advice on recognising and controlling African boxthorn, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board:



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