



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



Government  
of South Australia

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.

Copyright ©2001 Animal and Plant Control Commission of SA

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



ANIMAL AND PLANT  
CONTROL COMMISSION  
S O U T H A U S T R A L I A