



1. Dense infestation in bushland at Kuraby, QLD. 2. Glossy paired leaves 3. Showy red flower. 4. Scattered infestation in forest understorey at Drewvale, QLD.



GROUND COVER

Coral Creeper (*Barleria repens*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Coral creeper is a creeping or scrambling shrubby plant that is an emerging weed of urban bushland, riparian vegetation, coastal sand dunes, waste areas and disturbed sites. Also known as creeping barleria, red barleria and coral bells, this species is a member of the Acanthaceae family and is native to Africa.

Distribution

This plant has recently been reported in major urban centres in the coastal parts of eastern QLD (e.g. Mackay, Gladstone and Brisbane). The first records were from gardens in Brisbane in 2006, where collectors noted large numbers of young plants germinating near cultivated individuals.

In February of this year, two infestations were reported from the margins of urban bushland reserves in south-eastern Brisbane. A very dense population is located in a disturbed forest backing onto houses near the upper reaches of Slacks Creek in Kuraby, while a second population is present in the understorey of a bushland area in Drewvale. Shortly afterwards, a third infestation was detected in Toohey Forest at Tarragindi.

Description

A creeping or scrambling shrubby plant usually less than 70 cm tall. However when growing in the forest understorey it scrambles over nearby shrubs and can occasionally climb up to 2m in height. The younger stems are green and sparsely hairy, while older stems may become somewhat woody in nature. These stems tend to produce roots where they touch the ground, enabling this plant to spread quite quickly. The shiny, dark green leaves have entire margins and are borne in pairs along the stems.

The showy tubular flowers have five spreading lobes and are mostly produced in late summer and autumn (i.e. from February to April). These flowers are borne in the leaf forks and have two large green leafy bracts at their bases. Forms with pink, mauve and purple flowers are common in South Africa, but the form that is cultivated and naturalised in Queensland has bright red or pinkish-red flowers. The fruit is a small club-shaped capsule that splits open when mature to release four seeds.

Quick Facts

- > A creeping or scrambling shrubby plant with bright red tubular flowers
- > Its stems produce roots where they come into contact with the soil
- > Capable of forming a dense groundcover in forest understoreys

Habitat

This plant has been recorded in the understorey of urban bushland and disturbed forests, but it is also a potential weed of riparian vegetation, roadsides, disturbed sites and waste areas.



■ Documented distribution
■ Potential distribution



1. Creeping habit of plant cultivated in a garden. 2. Immature fruit and pair of leafy bracts.

Reproduction and Dispersal

Coral creeper reproduces by seed and vegetatively via its rooting stems. Its seeds may be spread up to a few metres from the parent plant when they are explosively released from their fruit. They may be further dispersed by water, animals and in mud. Stem segments and seeds are commonly spread from gardens into bushland via dumped garden waste and may also be spread by mowers and slashers.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

Like many closely related species in the Acanthaceae plant family that have become problem weeds in recent years, this plant is a potential threat to natural vegetation in sub-tropical and tropical Australia. It has shown a propensity to form dense infestations in the understorey of urban bushland reserves and is also likely to become a weed of riparian vegetation.

Control Methods

Individual plants and stems can be manually removed by hand pulling or with the aid of suitable tools taking care to ensure that as little as possible of the root system is left behind. In cases where total removal of the plant cannot be carried-out, the removal of flowers and immature fruit, preventing the opportunity for seed dispersal, will help reduce the potential of new infestations becoming established in the surrounding area.

For this particular species, documentation on the use of herbicides for control has proven difficult to find however treatment using Starane has proven to be successful on the infestation found in Kuraby.

There is also information available for similar species belonging to the same genus. Research suggests that control of coral creeper is also likely to be achieved using a range of other herbicides including Glyphosate, 2,4-D or Fluroxypyr. Application methods may include cut & swab, stem scraping and leaf wiping or foliar spray. For the latter, the use of a suitable non-ionic surfactant is recommended due to the glossy nature of the leaves. Within Queensland, the APVMA's Environmental Weeds Permit PER11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>) covers the use of these herbicides in an appropriate, non-crop situation. Before applying these methods of control within other state boundaries, it is recommended that you consult any relevant permits and government legislation.

Look a-likes

Coral creeper is closely related to Philippine violet (*Barleria cristata*) which is a more upright shrubby plant. The flowers of Philippine violet are very similar in shape to those of the coral creeper but are usually white or mauve instead of red. The bracts at the base of Philippine violet flowers are also spine-tipped, while those of coral creeper are not.



Top. Mauve flower

Bottom. Upright shrubby plant

The control methods referred to in Weed Watch™ should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the utilisation of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, Technigro does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

This information has been developed with the assistance of Dr Sheldon Navie. Photographs are also courtesy of Dr Navie. © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2010

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