



1. Infestation along a roadside at Springbrook. 2. Immature fruit. 3. Mature fruit with seeds. 4. Clusters of bright blue flowers.



Blue Stars (*Aristea ecklonii*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Blue Stars is a small lily-like plant native to the southern and western parts of Africa that is grown as a garden ornamental for its attractive blue, star-like, flowers. It has recently become established in bushland in south-eastern and eastern Australia, and has the potential to become a serious environmental weed.

Distribution

This species has become naturalised in some parts of south-eastern Australia (i.e. in the coastal districts of New South Wales and southern Victoria). It has also been reported from the Gold Coast hinterland and Brisbane areas in south-eastern Queensland.

Blue Stars was first reported becoming naturalised in Australia in the Moe district in Victoria in 1988. It was then reported from Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park in NSW in 1990. It has since been recorded from various other localities in both of these states. The first record from Queensland was made at Springbrook in February 2003, and by 2007 a large population was reported covering an area of about 3 hectares at this site. While a control program has since been implemented on this infestation, it has been recorded growing along surrounding roadsides in the area. Another infestation was reported growing along Bulimba Creek in Brisbane in November 2007.

Description

Blue Stars is a long-lived clumping plant that usually grows up to 70 cm tall. It develops clusters of long and narrow leaves (10-60 cm long and 5-12 mm wide) at the base of the plant and produces spreading woody rhizomes in the soil. The leaves are straight or slightly curved, with parallel veins running lengthwise and pointed tips. Plants produce upright flowering stems in spring and summer, which are branched in their upper parts. These stems are somewhat flattened in cross-section and slightly winged. They also bear a few alternately arranged leaves, which become gradually smaller towards the top of the plant.

The bright blue flowers are produced in loose branching clusters at the tops of the stems in spring and early summer. Each flower lasts for only one day, and usually only for a few hours in brightly lit conditions. Individual flowers are about 20-25 mm across and have six bright blue 'petals', with the three outer ones about two-thirds the size of inner ones. The fruit is an oblong capsule that is 12-20 mm long and slightly three-sided in nature. These capsules turn from green to brown as they mature and split open to reveal three compartments, each containing numerous small seeds about 1.5 mm long.

Quick Facts

- > Clump-forming plant usually growing up to 70 cm tall
- > Stems somewhat flattened and often slightly winged
- > Branched clusters of bright blue star-shaped flowers
- > Oblong capsules that have three seed compartments

Habitat

Blue Stars is usually found growing in well-drained soils in disturbed open forests, shrublands and grasslands. It is also a weed of roadsides, stream banks and rocky sites. In sub-tropical areas, it seems to prefer cooler and wetter upland habitats.





1. Mass germination of seedlings. 2. Clusters of strap-like leaves with parallel veins.

Reproduction and Dispersal

This species reproduces mainly by seed, but can also be propagated vegetatively by its rhizomes. Seeds are dispersed short distances by wind and water, but are usually spread into bushland areas in dumped garden waste (along with whole clumps or rhizome fragments).

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This garden plant is already regarded as an emerging environmental weed in Victoria and New South Wales. It has spread from cultivation and invaded several conservation areas in NSW, and is also considered to pose a threat to riparian vegetation and dry sclerophyll woodlands in Victoria. It can grow in the shade and has the potential to produce a dense ground cover under native forest or shrubland, thus preventing regeneration of native plants. While Blue Stars is in an early stage of invasion in Queensland, and may have a relatively limited distribution range in this state, it has shown a propensity to become a significant pest within suitable habitats.

Control Methods

Individual plants may be dug out, bagged, and disposed of in an appropriate manner. However, this can be difficult to achieve due to the spreading underground stems – which must be removed entirely to prevent re-growth. Soil disturbance should also be limited to prevent mass germination of seedlings following removal of adult plants.

In most cases herbicides may be the most effective control method, and have the added bonus of reduced soil disturbance. Control activities at Springbrook have shown that while Glyphosate readily kills the above-ground parts of the plant, it often re-sprouts from the rhizome. Experiments are underway at this site using different concentrations of Glyphosate, with and without Metsulfuron-methyl, and using different application methods.

Within Queensland, the use of products containing Glyphosate, Metsulfuron-methyl, or a combination of these chemicals (e.g. Trounce) is permitted for the spot spraying of environmental weeds such as Blue Stars in non-crop situations via the APVMA off-label permit number PER 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). However, unless otherwise stated in this permit, the use of the product must be in accordance with the instructions on its label. Within other state boundaries, it is recommended that all managers consult any relevant permits or government legislation applicable to their region.

Look a-likes

Blue Stars is somewhat similar to several native species of Flax Lily (*Dianella* spp.). However, the leaves of Flax Lilies are usually quite tough and often at least partially folded. Flax Lilies also have flowers with very prominent anthers and their fruit are usually blue, rounded in shape and fleshy.



Top. Flax Lily flowers with prominent anthers.

Bottom. Tufted habit with fleshy blue fruit.

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 Sheldon Navie © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2013

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Post: PO Box 2020, Nerang BC, QLD, 4210

T: 1800 678 611 technigro.com.au