
REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM “INTRACTABLE WEEDS AND PLANT INVADERS” – PONTA DELGADA, AZORES (PORTUGAL), 17-21 JULY 2006

Beautiful São Miguel, the main island in the naturalistic paradise of the Azores Archipelago, hosted the first International Symposium on Intractable Weeds and Plant Invaders (ISIW & PI). The aim of the Symposium was to gather scientists working on weed biology and invasiveness of *both* agricultural and environmental weeds in the same meeting, thus facilitating broader discussion and transfer of knowledge between these two complementary fields.

Luis Silva and his team put together an interesting programme, including a nice mixture of full-day sessions, technical excursions, and social events which was very much appreciated by the ca. 80 delegates who attended the Symposium at the campus of the Universidade dos Açores in Ponta Delgada.



The garden and lake at the Universidade dos Açores Campus (the Symposium venue), featuring Hydrangea bushes, a characteristic Azorean landmark

The EWRS was actively involved in the planning and management of the Symposium’s Scientific Programme, thanks to the commitment of the Working Groups on Invasive Plants and on Biological Control of Weeds, whose coordinators (Christian Bohren and Paul Hatcher) organised and chaired two sessions.

The first Symposium day featured a session on Environmental Weeds, which was nicely introduced by an intriguing keynote paper given by Curtis Daehler (University of Hawaii, Honolulu, USA) entitled “Jumping the fenceline: how weed scientists and conservation biologists can work together towards solving weed problems”. It was clear that many opportunities to “jump the fenceline” exist, and luckily some recent projects have seen these two categories of professionals share their expertise towards a

common weed management goal. I was especially pleased to hear Curtis naming the EWRS, and specifically the recent decision taken by the *Weed Research* Editorial Board to enlarge the scope of the journal as to clearly address also issues related to environmental weeds and invasive plants, as a good example of multidisciplinary-oriented approach. Here, let me take the opportunity to further stress this point and encourage all scientists working in these fields to submit their papers to *Weed Research*.



The Symposium banner

Another thought-provoking paper was the one presented by Jonathan Gressel (Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel), who addressed the topic “Native species are the most intractable evolving agricultural weeds”. With his usual verve and making full use of his well-known brilliant communication skills, Jonny questioned the need to give priority to the study and management of “invasive” weeds (at least in an agricultural context), pointing out that native species (e.g. *Striga* spp. and *Orobancha* spp.) are often far more troublesome. In his paper, Jonny states: “The replacement of the neutral term “naturalized” by alien or invasive weeds seems to this contrary scientist to be unwarranted and possibly xenophobic hyperbole, and focusing on introduced weeds may exclude studying our own problems, which can be of equal or greater importance. It matters less where a weed came from, it matters how it competes, and how we can deal with it”. I have deliberately quoted his full sentence because I find this a very stimulating topic for discussion and I would be glad to see EWRS members’ comments on it in the future issues of the Newsletter.

The second Symposium day, organised by the International Bracken Group (IBG), was entirely covered by papers dealing with the issues of ecotoxicology and control of bracken (*Pteridium* spp.).

The third day was dedicated to the field trip, which took us to Lagoa do Fogo Nature Reserve (where several endemic and invasive species coexist), a tea factory in Porto Formoso, the gorgeous Terra Nostra Garden in Furnas and lastly to the Lagoa das Furnas. During the excursion, we were lucky enough to taste a delicious traditional meal cooked in ground holes and “fuelled” by geothermal energy.



Jonathan Gressel giving a keynote paper with his usual verve

The fourth Symposium day was dedicated to Invasive Plants and Weeds, and featured several papers on *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*, a species which several European scientists are working on, a session nicely put up by Christian Bohren. The day ended with the meetings of the EWRS Working Groups on Invasive Plants and on Biological Control of Weeds.

The last day featured the session on Biological Control, with Paul Hatcher as chairperson, and a half-day tour to sites where bracken control experiments are run by Luis Silva and his colleagues.



Luís Silva explaining the bracken trial of the University of Ponta Delgada, Azores

A post-symposium tour to the Nordeste region of São Miguel allowed delegates to see plant invaders in a Special Protection Area where most of the remnant endemic Azorean flora is concentrated.

The Symposium was a very good opportunity for all delegates to broaden their view on intractable and invasive weeds, and several people expressed their wish to give continuity to this type of Symposium by organising another event somewhere else in Europe in a few year's time, an event that the EWRS will certainly back.

Report written (and pictures taken) by

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