

EWRS WG Meeting 2006 in Ponta Delgada, Azores

By Christian Bohren, coordinator of WG Invasive Plants, using the EWRS scientific secretary's report of Paolo Barberi edited in the EWRS Newsletter No. 96

The "Centro de Conservação e Protecção do Ambiente" of the University of the Azores under Luís Silva has organised together with EWRS and International Bracken Group (IBG) the "**International Symposium Intractable Weeds and Plant Invaders**" on 17-21 July in Ponta Delgada, Azores, Portugal.

After its meeting of establishment in February 2006 the participation in the organizing committee of this international symposium was the first activity of the EWRS Working Group Invasive Plants.

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 fence line: how weed scientists and conservation biologists can work together towards solving weed problems". It was clear that many opportunities "to jump the fence line" exist, and luckily some recent projects have seen these two categories of professionals share their expertise towards a common weed management goal. I was specially 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.

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, Johnny 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, Johnny states: "The replacement of the neutral term "natrualized" 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 this 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.

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. Other presentations talked about clinical cases in ruminants in Portugal, plants causing photosensitivity in Brazil, invasive plants in

Croatian agriculture and the origin of weeds in their main communities in Poland. 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 chair person, and half-day tour to sites where bracken control experiments are run by Luís Silva and his colleagues. These experiments nicely showed that a successful bracken control subsequently needs a re-establishment of ground cover. Tools for bracken control were demonstrated.

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. We searched for the endemic Azores Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula murina*) – a small rare landbird, endemic to the Azores. We did not see the bird self, but we heard his characteristic “beep” and saw his traces on brackenleaves.

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 in Europe in a few year’s time, an event that EWRS will certainly back. It is now planned to organize the follow-up Symposium in September 2008 in Croatia.