

Using weeds to manage for nature conservation

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Summary Climatic and other environmental changes induced by *Homo sapiens* in the last few centuries have made the goal of maintaining pre-European ecosystems in protected areas impossible to achieve. I argue that it is best to concentrate on managing reserves to maintain those species and geo-features that most depend on them for their future. This shift in the overarching goals for reserve management turns exotic plant species from the enemies of naturalness into ecosystem elements that may be negative, positive or neutral. Unlike introduced animals, which have been clearly responsible for a large number of extinctions, there are few weeds that are known to threaten any native species with extinction in Australia. Gorse (*Ulex europaeus* L.), which threatens other plants,

such as *Spyridium microphyllum* (Hook.f.) Benth., in Tasmanian riparian vegetation may be one. However, there are many examples of weed species playing a positive role in sustenance or shelter of threatened native animal species. Examples include the importance of gorse for shelter from predation for the eastern barred bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii* Gray) and the importance of sea rocket (*Cakile* spp.) for the sustenance of the orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster* Latham) on its migration between Tasmania and mainland Australia. Therefore, those managing for nature conservation may need to incorporate species that are usually classified as environmental weeds in their management tool kits.