Profile of Christina Birnbaum

2014 recipient of the CAWS Early Career Weed Scientist Travel Award

I am currently working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Terrestrial Ecology Research Group at Murdoch University, Western Australia. The group, which is led by Professor Neal Enright, is working on a number of projects that cover topics such as fire ecology, rare species ecology, effects of climate change on vegetation dynamics and restoration ecology. I am currently involved in projects that attempt to elucidate recruitment failure of some of the jarrah forest species in Western Australia as well as understand the effects of disturbance on species regeneration abilities.

Prior to working at Murdoch University I did my PhD in 2008-2013 at Macquarie University (NSW) under the supervision of Professor Michelle Leishman. During these years I was investigating the role of soil biota, predominantly soil mutualists such as nitrogen fixing bacteria and (mycorrhizal) fungi, in plant invasions in Australia. We chose five *Acacia spp*. as our focus species to investigate questions pertaining plant-microbe interactions in plant invasions.

Prior to commencing my PhD at Macquarie University in 2008 I was working on the invasion ecology of goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis* L.) in Estonia where I did my MSc and BSc at the Estonian University of Agriculture. During these years I was also also the coordinator of Estonian alien invasive species database and fact-sheets for NOBANIS (European Network on Invasive Alien Species) project. The European Network on Invasive Alien Species (NOBANIS) is a gateway to information on alien and invasive species in North and Central Europe.

I will use the CAWS Early Career Weed Scientist Travel Award to present my PhD work at the 4th International Symposium on Weeds and Invasive Plants (Agricultural Weeds and Plant Invaders) in Montpellier, France, May 18-23, 2014. This conference offers a unique platform to share knowledge, exchange contacts and form future collaborations. Some Australian acacias are serious weeds in the Mediterranean region of Europe and hence exchanging knowledge on different aspects of their invasion ecology, including on the role of soil biota, is extremely important in order to enhance our understanding of these species' invasion mechanisms, both at home in Australia as well as overseas.