

Environment Update

NIRC's Argentine Ant Eradication Program (AAEP) staff and contractors continue to work under the guidance of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to conduct targeted baiting in Argentine ant infested areas. This program is funded through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC).

The AAEP Team have been assessing zones that have been treated as part of the Program. Bella the detector dog has been working in Zones 3, 4, 5, 13, 14 and 15 (see figure 1). Bella will be used to monitor Zone 7 in the coming weeks. In zone 3 Bella located persisting ants along the cliff line and one other minor infestation which has now been treated. In zone 5 and 15, visual post treatment assessments found only minor persisting ant infestations which have also been treated.



Figure 1. Extent and location of known Argentine ant infestations on Norfolk Island as at June 2021. Green zones indicates zones that have undergone treatment and are now undergoing post-treatment assessments. Red zones are those that have not yet been treated and the ants remain unmanaged

Treatment is to commence in Zone 9 in September. The AAEP team have been communicating with local landholders in this zone to prepare for the upcoming treatment. Ground treatments will be used in the open areas and around dwellings. Aerial treatments will only be used in areas of dense vegetation and difficult areas to access.

A new infestation of Argentine ants was found in an area on New Cascade Road. This zone has been classified as Zone 16 and has been treated. No ants were found during the Post Treatment Assessment (PTA). This site will be monitored regularly.

The presence of a new Argentine Ant zone indicates how easily the pest species can be transported across the island. This typically occurs in pallets of timber/goods, firewood, car wrecks, pot plants or mulch, where there are spaces for the ants to harbour. We ask for the community's vigilance in transporting material or machinery around the island, and to contact the AAEP team via Customer Care on 22244 when items are being relocated from established Argentine ant zones, so that this can be inspected and treated if necessary. Treatment can be done quickly and at no cost to the individual.

The Environment Program continues to be implemented across the Public Reserves. Recent activities have included:

- Ball Bay Reserve – community tree planting day on 6th June. Approximately 50 people planted around 450 native trees over a 4-hour period, with morning tea served to the volunteers
- Bumboras Reserve – ongoing woody weed removal from hillside above beach
- Hundred Acre Reserve – removal of Coral Berry weeds (85.5 volunteers hours in June), self-composting public toilet partially installed
- Cascade (Cockpit) Reserve – stream-protection fencing installed, community tree planting planned (tentatively for August pending weather) with Norfolk Island Central School, cattle trough and solar pump to be installed shortly
- Point Ross Reserve – ongoing woody weed control

The majority of Environment Program work continues to be completed by a variety of local contractors. Some activities, such as installation of the cattle trough at Cockpit Reserve will be completed in July. NIRC is also happy to announce that further funding has been provided by DITRDC for continuation of the program. NIRC looks forward to implementing the next 12 months of activities to improve our Public Reserves in partnership with local businesses and the community.

The Norfolk Island Conservation Volunteers (a part of the Norfolk Island Flora and Fauna Society) continue to organise volunteers to remove Coral Berry and other weeds species in Hundred Acre Reserve each Wednesday, with morning tea provided to the volunteers by NIRC. The effort provided by the volunteers is highly valued by all who enjoy Hundred Acre Reserve.

The remaining community tree planting days are scheduled for Bumbora and Cascade (Cockpit) Reserves. Previous scheduled dates for these events have been postponed due to weather. Revised dates are expected to be set next week and communicated via media release to the community.

Phil Reid

MANAGER PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

16 July 2021