

The military and the pink invasion

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Many of you have probably seen the beautiful pink flowers growing in large numbers along the roadside, in grasslands and on many military bases and units, especially in the Gauteng, North West, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces during the summer season. A natural reaction would be to stop and cut the flowers to take home. Ever wonder what it is?

BEWARE!

Attractive as its flowers may be, this plant spells trouble for our environment. It is the worst kind of invasive alien weed, and has been lurking prettily and silently for some time. It not only replaces veld grasses as food for cattle, but degrades the soil and edges out colonies of indigenous grassland orchids and wild flowers.

The pom pom weed (*Campuloclinium macrocephalum*) is

indigenous to South America and belongs to the daisy family. It is a tall unpalatable herb with several erect green or purplish stems with light purple to pink flower heads. Hundreds of seeds are dispersed by a single flower head. The fleshy tuber-like roots deprive the soil of nutrients and water, making it difficult for wild flowers and veld grasses to establish and flourish in its vicinity.

It gradually replaces the more palatable plant species as a result and tends to become one of the only surviving plant species in grazing areas. It reproduces from its roots and through the dispersal of its seeds. This is the reason why the weed has become so widespread. By allowing its stems, leaves and flowers to die back in winter and store plenty of nutrients in its roots it is able to survive frost and fires and is one of the first plants to start growing in spring. If the spread of this weed is not controlled, it will take over the entire grassland biome in South Africa.

In order to stop this weed in its tracks and avoid a potential environ-

Pink pom pom weed is taking over the grasslands on military properties!

mental disaster the Department of Agriculture, assisted by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has established the Pom Pom Project Inter-governmental Co-ordinating Committee. As it is a national department responsible for the management of one of the largest land portfolios and as an adjacent land user, the Department of Defence (DOD) is legally compelled to contribute to the success of this national



The pom pom weed (*Campuloclinium macrocephalum*).



effort. From December 2006 a spraying programme was instituted through the Working for Water Programme and in co-operation with Gautrans. The DOD will participate through the Operation Vuselela initiative and be

involved in this committee. However, these mechanisms are not sufficient to address the control and spreading of the pom pom weed within the military environment. All members can contribute to this effort by becoming involved in the introduction of organised control measures or ad hoc eradication actions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Report the location of new infestations of pom pom weed to the environmental officer.
- Do not pick any flowers for aesthetical purposes.
- Do not transport plants to other regions.
- Individual plants occurring in gardens or on pavements must be eradicated as follows:
 - ▲ Spray with a registered herbi-

cide. The active ingredients of the 2,4-Dipicloran chemical is used by farmers in the spraying of pom pom weed. Consult the environmental officer for assistance in determining the correct herbicide to use.

- ▲ Alternatively, cut off the pink flower heads and put into an intact bag to avoid the dispersal of seeds from the flowers.
- ▲ Take out the rest of the weed without leaving any roots or parts of roots in the soil.
- ▲ All parts of the weed must be kept isolated and disposed of by burning.

For more information on the pom pom weed, contact Maj Eric Mali at tel no: (012) 339 5311 or the Working for Water toll free information line: 0800 005 376. 

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