



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3

Volume 4
Number 6 *November-December, 1955*

Article 12

11-1955

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Recommended Citation

Meadly, G. R. W. (1955) "Weeds of Western Australia - Geraldton carnation weed or false caper (*Euphorbia terracina* L.)," *Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3*: Vol. 4: No. 6, Article 12.

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FALSE CAPER OR GERALDTON CARNATION WEED

(*Euphorbia terracina* L.)

Although at present mainly confined to the coastal sandy soils in the vicinity of Geraldton and Dongara, South Australian experience indicates that it could become established at inland centres. Losses of stock in other States have been attributed to eating false caper.

WEEDS of Western Australia

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GERALDTON CARNATION WEED OR FALSE CAPER

(*Euphorbia terracina* L.)

A NUMBER of species of *Euphorbia*, both native and introduced, occur as weeds in Western Australia. *E. Drummondii*, known as milk-weed, or mat balsam is a prostrate herb found naturally over an extensive inland area, but being most prevalent in the districts between Carnamah and Northampton. This plant is cyanogenetic as is also another native species, *E. boophthona*, often referred to as Gascoyne poison or tree balsam. The latter has been responsible for heavy losses of stock on North-West stock routes. The toxicity of the genus has been dealt with fully by C. A. Gardner and H. W. Bennetts (*The Toxic Species of the Genus Euphorbia—Journal of Agriculture of Western Australia*, Vol. 2—July-August, 1953).

Of the introduced species, several annuals including petty spurge (*E. peplus*) are of little consequence as weeds, but two perennials somewhat similar to one another in habit—*E. segetalis* and *E. terracina*, have given reason for concern. *E. segetalis* has been recorded from several places along the south coast including Albany, Bremer Bay and Esperance, while Geraldton Carnation Weed, as the name implies, is most prevalent in the Geraldton district although also recorded from Fremantle and Esperance.

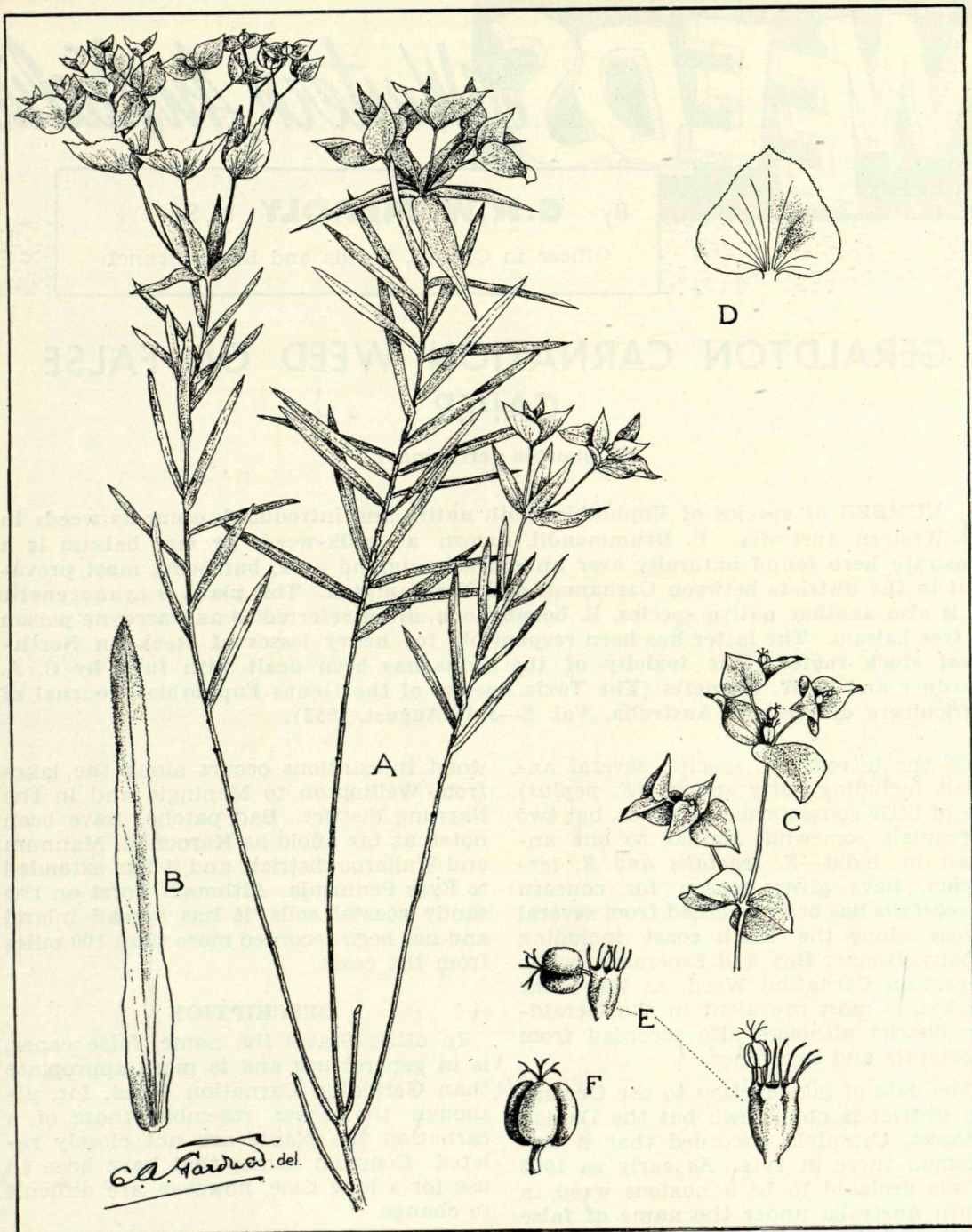
The date of introduction to the Geraldton district is not known but the Danish botanist, Ostenfeld, recorded that it was common there in 1914. As early as 1903 it was declared to be a noxious weed in South Australia under the name of false caper and apparently had already been established for some time. A recent report from that State reveals that it has spread extensively in the intervening years. It is growing thickly on the coastal and neglected areas of the Adelaide plain from Port Adelaide to Aldinga and one of the

worst infestations occurs along the lakes from Wellington to Meningie and in the Narrung district. Bad patches have been noted as far afield as Karoonda, Mannum and Wallaroo districts and it has extended to Eyre Peninsula. Although worst on the sandy coastal soils, it has spread inland and has been recorded more than 100 miles from the coast.

DESCRIPTION

In other States the name, false caper, is in general use and is more appropriate than Geraldton Carnation Weed, for, although the leaves resemble those of a carnation the plants are not closely related. Common names that have been in use for a long time, however, are difficult to change.

The plant is a hairless, leafy, pale green, erect perennial one to three feet in height. The broken stems exude a sticky latex. The stalkless leaves are narrow and three quarters to two inches long with teeth towards the apex. The somewhat inconspicuous inflorescence consists of an



GERALDTON CARNATION WEED
(*Euphorbia terracina* L.)

A—Habit of plant; B—Leaf; C—Inflorescence; D—Bract; E—Flower Cluster; F—Fruit

(From a pen-drawing by Mr. C. A. Gardner, Government Botanist.)

umbel of four to five rays repeatedly forked. The ovate-rhomboidal bracts each have a short point and are toothed along the edges. The glands are greenish and crescent-shaped with slender horns while the fruits, which are less than on quarter inch long are three lobed and smooth. The seeds are greyish in colour and smooth.

Geraldton Carnation Weed flowers in spring and summer.

SIGNIFICANCE

It is difficult to assess the significance of the weed based on experience in Western Australia, as at present, it is practically entirely confined to poor sandy soils, especially coastal sand dunes. Although it obviously favours the lighter soils we cannot conclude that it will not become established on better soils further inland. South Australian experience shows that this can happen. As already mentioned, in the neighbouring State it occurs more than 100 miles inland and grows vigorously on relatively heavy soils.

Besides possessing the properties of an undesirable perennial weed there is some evidence to show that Geraldton Carnation Weed can be harmful to stock. The fact that disorders are rarely attributed to the plant is undoubtedly due in no small measure to its unpalatable nature although the young growth is sometimes eaten quite readily.

Fortunately the seeds are not specially adapted to facilitate dispersal and most of the spread has occurred along roads

where seeds can be carried by vehicles and stock. There is no definite information concerning the longevity of the seeds, but they are likely to remain viable for several years.

CONTROL

Grazing is not a satisfactory method of control as firstly the plant is not attractive to stock and secondly there is always the risk of poisoning if stock are forced to eat large quantities.

On arable land, especially on the better soils, it has been controlled by good tillage but, on lighter soils, particularly where drift is liable, such measures cannot always be undertaken with safety, especially when they involve more than one operation in a year. Under such conditions two alternative methods, competition from vigorous desirable species and chemicals suggest themselves. Perennial veldt grass (*Ehrharta calycina*) has proved an effective competitor, being well adapted to the light sandy soils which favour the growth of the weed. This grass has been used successfully for checking Geraldton Carnation Weed on sandy soils in South Australia.

Two pounds acid equivalent of 2,4-D ester per acre has proved effective. Good results have followed spraying as late as the seeding stage, but in order to prevent seed formation, should be undertaken earlier. The plants also react more readily when making active growth. This method has been used quite extensively for treating Geraldton Carnation Weed on roadsides.

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