

Australian Threatened Species

Cumberland Plain Ecological Communities

CONSERVATION STATUS

CUMBERLAND PLAIN WOODLAND

COMMONWEALTH: Endangered

(Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999)

NEW SOUTH WALES: Endangered (Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995)

SHALE/SANDSTONE TRANSITION FOREST

COMMONWEALTH: Endangered

(Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999)

NEW SOUTH WALES: Endangered (Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995)

Other vegetation communities including Elderslie Banksia scrub, Castlereagh swamp woodland and Blue gum high forest are also considered endangered under NSW legislation.



Photo: Botanic Gardens Trust - J.Plaza

Western Sydney's Cumberland Plain region is home to the state's first and largest human settlement. It has been heavily cleared over the past 200 years, first for agriculture and then for urban expansion. Only 12 per cent of the original vegetation remains. Of the 22 Cumberland Plain ecological communities, 12 are so badly affected they are listed as endangered. Along with clearing, weeds are one of the biggest threats facing these fragmented patches of bush.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

An ecological community is a group of species (plants and animals) found together in a particular area, usually with similar soil, landscape and weather. The 12 endangered ecological communities of the Cumberland Plain

are found nowhere else in Australia. They range from open grassy woodlands to rainforest, tall forests to bushy scrub. These remnants are also home to threatened plants and animals such as the endangered shrub *Pimelea spicata* and the Cumberland Plain Land Snail.

WHERE IS THE CUMBERLAND PLAIN?

The Cumberland Plain basin stretches from Ryde in the east to the Nepean River in the west, and from Cattai in the north to Thirlmere in the south. Altitude ranges mainly from 20 to 100 metres and the plain receives less than 800 millimetres of rainfall each year.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Cumberland Plain woodland was the first endangered ecological community to be listed under Commonwealth legislation
- Each month over 6000 volunteers work on-ground to help restore our precious natural environment in the Cumberland Plain
- A Cumberland Plain woodland recovery plan is being developed. It involves cooperation from state government agencies, local governments, catchment management authorities, community groups, and the housing industry.

ESCAPED GARDEN WEEDS: A MAJOR THREAT!



WHY ARE ESCAPED GARDEN WEEDS A PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA?

Weeds cause major problems for our environment and cost the economy around \$4 billion every year. Garden plant introductions make up over 70 per cent of the 1,765 listed environmental weeds. These plants compete with native species for light, space and nutrients and smother existing vegetation. They also change the structure of an ecological community by creating a thick tangle on the ground or blocking sun as they overtake trees above.

Some plants are more likely to become invasive than others – for example, they might grow aggressively, have no natural predators, or are easily dispersed. Their ability to invade bushland is also increased by factors such as soil disturbance from clearing, increased urban runoff, and the dumping of green waste into bushland.

WHY ARE WEEDS A THREAT IN THE CUMBERLAND PLAIN?

Remaining bush in the Cumberland Plain is highly fragmented, often creating islands of bushland in a sea of houses. Weeds move easily across the boundaries between the two areas, with gardens providing a constant source of new weeds.

The most common weeds in the area are fireweed, spear thistle, cat's ear, African olive, pigeon-grass, plaintain, paddy's lucerne, bridal creeper and sow thistle. Birds that eat berries of the weed plant also often spread weed species and deposit seeds elsewhere. In this way plants from gardens in urbanised areas spread to other patches many suburbs away.

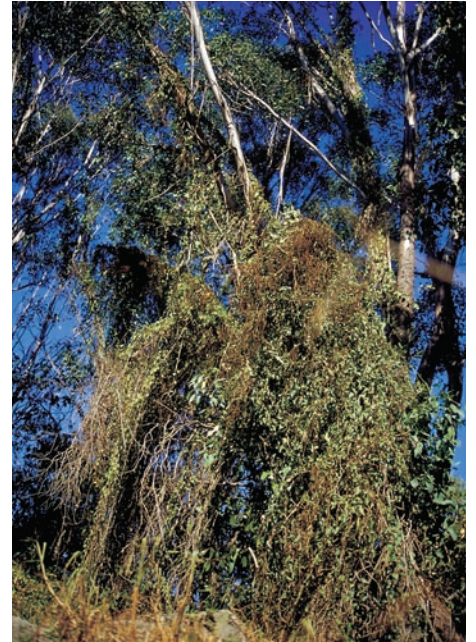
WHAT'S BEING DONE?

Many Sydney & region councils are raising awareness of local weed species. The NSW & ACT Nursery & Garden Industry has embarked on a 'Grow Me Instead' program, promoting alternatives to known escaped garden weeds and encouraging nursery growers and sellers to remove known or potential weed products from sale. Thousands of volunteers also work to protect the Cumberland Plain ecological communities. These groups remove weeds from bushland, help create corridors between remnant patches and raise community awareness.

In addition the Australian Government recently launched its new four-year, \$40 million *Defeating the Weeds Menace* program, which takes a national approach to tackling our most significant weeds.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Check with your local council or your regional Sydney Weeds Committee to identify weeds in your area
- Remove all potential or known weeds and ideally replace them with local native plants that will support wildlife - ask your local nursery for a list of potential weeds and alternative species
- Join a local community conservation group
- Do not release aquarium or pond plants into streams or dump garden waste in bushland



Moth vine in Cumberland Plain woodland.
Photo: Richard Hocking

CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

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Visit: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/Recovery+planning+for+the+Cumberland+Plains+endangered+ecological+communities

You can also find out more information about Australia's threatened species by visiting www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened or contacting the Department of the Environment and Heritage Community Information Unit on free-call 1800 803 772.

