January 2020

No. 55

SOUTHERN AFRICAN PLANT INVADERS ATLAS


40 years of SAPIA

The Southern African Plant Invaders Atlas (SAPIA), an initiative of the Weeds Research Division of the ARC-PHP was launched in 1994 but has its roots in the roadside surveys by Lesley Henderson dating back to 1979. The SAPIA database currently holds 96 000 georeferenced records of ~850 alien plant taxa growing outside of cultivation. SAPIA, under the auspices of the ARC, comes to an end in March 2020 following the retirement of the SAPIA co-ordinator, Lesley Henderson. Funding for SAPIA from the Department of Environmental Affairs has been transferred from ARC to the South African National Biodiversity Institute who is responsible for the future direction and management of the project.

New ARC-PPRI Handbooks

These books aim to create awareness of invasive alien plants in South Africa and to encourage landowners to implement measures for their control and prevention of further invasions.
Overview

The Southern African Plant Invaders Atlas (SAPIA) was launched in January 1994 to collate data on the distribution, abundance and habitat types of alien plants growing outside of cultivation in southern Africa. The atlas region covers primarily South Africa, and to a much lesser extent, neighbouring countries. The SAPIA database incorporates georeferenced records gathered by 710 participants since 1994, along with roadside surveys by Lesley Henderson since 1979. The species lists and distribution data in the SAPIA database have provided baseline information for national projects on invasive alien plants, such as the Natural Resources Management Programmes (NRMP) of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). It has also directly contributed to the listing of invasive plants under the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, Act 10 of 2004 (NEM:BA A&IS Regulations). The SAPIA database is a useful and functioning resource for the storage, management and verification of data and as such provides support to a number of applied initiatives, including biological control and work on incursion response planning by the South African National Biodiversity Institute’s Biological Invasions Directorate.

History of roadside surveys in South Africa

Roadside surveys of invasive plants in South Africa were pioneered by Henderson and Musil (née Duggan) starting in 1979 in the central Transvaal, now Gauteng, with the remainder of the Transvaal surveyed in 1982 and 1983. Surveys of the rest of South Africa were conducted by Henderson from 1986, starting with Natal, followed by the Orange Free State, northern Cape, eastern Cape, western and central Cape, and southern and southwestern Cape being completed in May 1993.

The method used in these surveys was designed initially to make use of otherwise unproductive travelling time whilst engaged in other research projects. The method was refined as the surveys progressed until a standardized method was developed. The presence and abundance of all alien trees, large shrubs and conspicuous climbers which appeared to be naturalized or occurring outside of cultivation were recorded for each Acocks veld type category, habitat type (roadsides and adjoining veld, and streambanks) and quarter-degree (= 15 minute) square traversed by road.

Recordings of species on roadsides and in the adjacent veld were made from a moving vehicle along road transects of between 5 and 10 km long. Recordings of streambank species were made at virtually all watercourse crossings on the survey route.

From 1994 roadside surveys were adapted to meet the requirements of the Southern African Plant Invaders Atlas (SAPIA) project. Recordings were made per 5 minute square and conspicuous herbaceous species were included. Abundance ratings were estimated per 5 minute square.

Literature on roadside surveys prior to SAPIA


40 years of SAPIA: a brief history

The Southern African Plant Invaders Atlas mapping project (SAPIA)

SAPIA was modelled on the very successful South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP) which was launched in 1986. SAPIA was launched in January 1994 and its aim was to collate information on the distribution, abundance and habitat types of invasive and naturalized alien plants in southern Africa. The first phase of SAPIA, involving volunteer participants, was scheduled for a five-year period, ending in December 1998. A pocket field guide, “Plant invaders of southern Africa”, was compiled to help with the identification of all listed species. SAPIA Newsletters were posted to all participants on a quarterly basis.

The atlas region covered South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Information was recorded on two standardized atlas sheets, with slightly different species lists, covering the western and eastern halves of the atlas region. One hundred plant taxa were listed on each sheet, with a combined total of 161 species.

WIP provided a user-friendly template for online public submission of records (these records would be held in a holding file until verified by Lesley Henderson). A template for submission of batches of records was also made available. Lesley Henderson had direct access to the SAPIA data at WIP where the records could be managed online. By March 2010 the Weeds and Invasive Plants (WIP) website www.agis.agric.za/wip/ was the most frequently visited website on AGIS.

Operational problems within AGIS eventually led to the complete cessation of all activities and closure of WIP by 2013.

Weeds and Invasive Plants website (WIP)

In 1998 the SAPIA database was identified at a workshop commissioned by the Department of Agriculture as the starting point for the development of a national information system for the management of invasive alien plants. It was incorporated into AGIS (Agricultural Georeferenced Information System) in 2000 but only a limited amount of information could be accessed at the Weeds and Invasive Plants website.

The SAPIA project was revived in 2005 with funding from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry’s Working for Water Programme. One of its main objectives was to make all the SAPIA data available online at WIP. From 2005 to 2010 the functionality of the SAPIA database was improved and access to data was made possible at the WIP website. The following information was made available:

- Distribution data (at the ¼ degree (15 minute) square level) for all species
- Six standardized reports:
  - Species lists per southern African country (RSA, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi),
  - Species lists per province in South Africa
  - Species lists per ¼ degree square
  - Lists of ¼ degree squares per species
  - Mini reports for all species
  - Mini reports for all ¼ degree squares
- Virtual herbarium with fact sheets, photographs and line drawings of 260 species
- Distribution maps in relation to various environmental variables

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40 years of SAPIA: a brief history

Following the demise of WIP, SAPIA phase two records proceeded with the electronic submission of records by e-mail. A standardized recording form was designed for submission of records. However records were also received in various formats. Quarterly SAPIA Newsletters were sent by e-mail to participants and posted at the ARC and Invasive Species South Africa websites.

SAPIA phase two continued until 2016 with funding from DWAF and thereafter funding was received from the National Resource Management Programmes (NRMP) of the Department of Environment Affairs with the decision to channel funds through the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) from April 2018.

Some literature relating to SAPIA


ARC-PPRI Handbooks No. 20 and 21

ARC-PPRI Handbook No. 20

Invasive cacti in South Africa: Their identification and control.

Authors: Hildegard Klein & Helmuth Zimmermann

This book will enable landowners to identify the currently known invasive cacti in South Africa, using ample colour photographs and language appropriate to non-scientists. It discusses in detail 33 species covered by the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA), as well as briefly illustrating 6 emerging invaders. The most important groups of indigenous plants that are sometimes mistaken for cacti, are also illustrated.

The best management strategy is recommended for each of the invasive cactus species. It also explains the science of biological control in simple terms, indicating which biocontrol agents are available for use against each cactus species, and with enough details to enable landowners to employ them successfully against their own cactus weeds. A supplementary reading list, as well as a list of useful contact details, is included.

ARC-PPRI Handbook No. 21

Invasive alien plants in South Africa

Author: Lesley Henderson

This book provides descriptions, distributions and illustrations of more than 400 species and includes all listed invasive plant species that are covered by the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA) (10/2004).

Each species account includes its legal and invasive status, biological control if available, region of origin, cultivated uses, habitats invaded, potential threats or impacts and other harmful properties.

A quick guide to identification is provided inside the back cover for the following major groups of plants: Grasses, Reeds & Grass-like plants; Aquatic & Wetland plants; Marine plants; Herbs; Climbers & Scramblers; Trees & Shrubs.

The books should be available from March 2020.

For these and other ARC–PHP publications contact:

Marcus Thipe
E-Mail: ThipeS@arc.agric.za
Tel: 012 808 8000/8118 or
Booksales@arc.agric.za

Summary of contents of 55 editions of SAPIA News

SAPIA phase II:
Launch (1), achievements of first 5 years and plans for next 5 years (15), Forty years of SAPIA (55)

Weeds and Invasive Plants (WIP) website:
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New ARC-PPRI handbooks:

### Summary of contents of 55 editions of SAPIA News

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