

W.9 PARROT'S FEATHER/WATERDUISENDBLAAR

(*Myriophyllum aquaticum* (Vell.) Verdc.)

Family: Haloragaceae

(Compiled by the Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria)

Parrot's feather is a rooted waterplant with long shoots whose pale green tips emerge for about 0,2 to 0,5 m above the water surface. Plants root in the mud of banks and in shallow water, extending into the surrounding water to form a dense tangle of stems and roots. The leaves, finely divided like feathers, are arranged in whorls of (3-4) 5 to 6. Minute, cream-coloured flowers are borne at the base of the leaves on the upper parts of shoots. Only female plants are known from southern and eastern Africa and parrot's feather therefore propagates only vegetatively in these regions. This form of reproduction is very efficient, however, and even very small fragments of the plant may regenerate, providing they include at least one node.

Related species

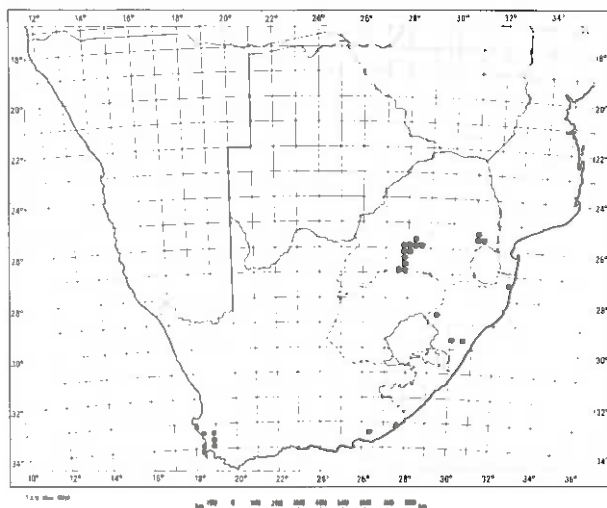
At least two species of *Myriophyllum* are

found in southern Africa: *M. aquaticum* (parrot's feather), a native of South America now naturalised in many countries, and *M. spicatum* L., a world-wide species that grows here naturally. These two species can be distinguished easily as in *M. aquaticum* the green, leafy shoots emerge above the water surface, whereas *M. spicatum* is completely submerged except for the leafless flowering shoots.

Distribution

Parrot's feather was introduced into South Africa before 1919 and has since spread to all four provinces. It now grows in many dams and streams particularly in the south-western and eastern Cape, Natal, and the southern and eastern Transvaal. The





species is also found in Zimbabwe. It is still commonly grown in garden pools and fish tanks and man is responsible for its present world-wide distribution. Local spread is caused by agents such as floods, animals and boating as well as other recreational activities.

Ecology

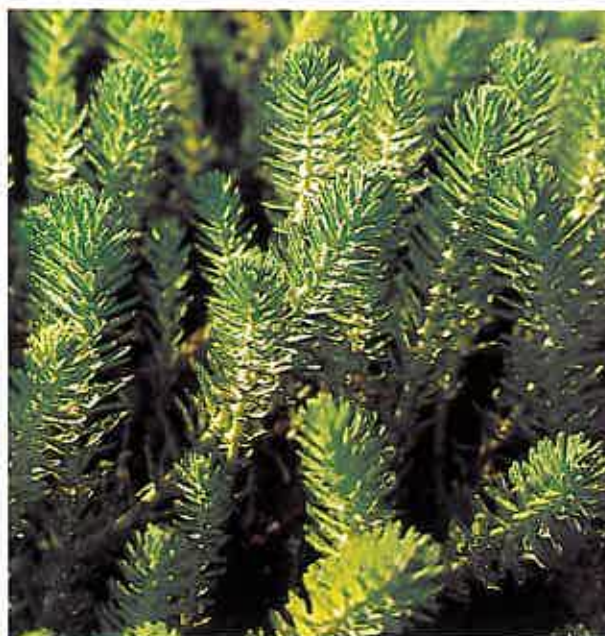
The species flourishes in clear, polluted, and even slightly brackish water. Extreme heat and frost may affect the aerial shoots but do not kill the plants. Parrot's feather requires adequate sunlight and dies back in water containing a high percentage of silt or polluting particles or, when shaded by riverside trees and bushes. The species, which often occurs in dense, pure stands, is capable of invading the shallow parts of most water bodies in southern Africa.

Importance

Parrot's feather may hinder stream flow, clog water inlets, interfere with fishing and fish culture, get entangled in propellers and cause drowning of humans and animals. It also provides a breeding place for disease-carrying mosquitoes and snails. The Rand Water Board spends thousands of rands annually to keep the species in check.

Legislation and control

Parrot's feather is a proclaimed noxious weed throughout the Republic of South Africa. (Proclamation 252/1956 (Government Gazette 2002/2 Nov. 1956) of the Weeds Act No. 42 of



1937). For control measures see Steyn, Scott, Ashton & Vivier (1979).

Note

The scientific name is derived from the Greek *myrios* = thousand, and *phyllon* = leaf; *aquaticum* is the Latin for "living in water".

Species Number: 5834.000-00100

Literature

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