Functional groups of bird-dispersed weeds

Carl Gosper and Gabrielle Vivian-Smith
Alan Fletcher Research Station, Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines and CRC for Australian Weed Management, PO Box 36, Sherwood, Queensland 4075, Australia

Summary  Bird-dispersed weeds represent a major challenge for conservation and weed management. The processes of seed dispersal and weed spread are complex and difficult to predict. Characteristics of the fruits and fruiting patterns of weed species may play an important role in invasiveness. The choice of fruits by fruit-eating birds, and hence the potential transport of seeds, may be influenced by fruit morphology, nutritional value of the fruit pulp and the time of year of fruit production. In this project we ask the following questions: Do more highly invasive weed species have fruits that are more attractive to dispersers, or produce fruits when few other bird-dispersed fruits are available? Can functional groups of weeds be identified based on their fruit characteristics? These groups of species may exhibit similar modes of spread, which may be useful in their management. We present our preliminary findings for aspects of fruit morphology, nutrient content and phenology for a range of weed species in subtropical south-east Queensland.

Keywords  Fruit, frugivory, seed dispersal, invasive, plant-animal interaction.