



## Bulletin March 2025

### The Cactus Formerly Known As...

Recent taxonomic opinion suggests that certain cactus species classified as *Nopalea* (fig. 1) should once again be included within the *Opuntia* genus, reversing a "split" that occurred nearly 20 years ago, when taxonomists argued that certain species within the *Opuntia* genus were sufficiently unique to warrant their inclusion in the genus *Nopalea*.

The species of *Nopalea* form a small and distinctive group, all found in Mexico. The flowers are adapted to pollination by hummingbirds, unlike the rest of the *Opuntia* genus where the species are usually pollinated by invertebrates. This distinction in flower form, together with aspects of seed morphology, has previously been considered sufficient to warrant a separate genus. However, contemporary molecular studies of the Opuntoid group indicate that *Nopalea* is nested within the broader *Opuntia* group.

Cacti are not native to Australia, so we are guided on taxonomic revisions by authors that work on the group in their natural range. The Queensland Herbarium has consulted with relevant experts and has adopted the accepted classification used by *Plants of the World Online* from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



All species of *Opuntia*, including the species formerly classified as *Nopalea*, are 'biosecurity matter' in Queensland, except *O. ficus-indica* (Indian fig). By restricting trade of high-risk cacti, we reduce the propagule pressure, which significantly reduces the probability of establishment. Opuntoid cacti includes the infamous prickly pear that once infested 24 million hectares of land in Queensland and New South Wales (fig. 2), and was only brought under control by the spectacularly effective biocontrol, cactoblastis moth. Unfortunately, despite being barred from sale, these highly invasive plants are regularly found in private collections and for sale. Two species of former *Nopalea*, *O. cochenillifera* (fig. 1) and *O. dejecta*, were introduced to Australia via the ornamental trade.

If you see a suspected high-risk cactus, including *Opuntia cochenillifera* (syn. *Nopalea cochenillifera*), reach out to your Weed Spotters [regional coordinator](#), send photos to [Queensland.Herbarium@gld.gov.au](mailto:Queensland.Herbarium@gld.gov.au), or contact Biosecurity Queensland on **13 25 23** or [online](#).

*Acknowledgments:* Dr. Paul Forster, Queensland Herbarium; Stacy Harris, Biosecurity Queensland, Daniel Lewis-Kuhl, Biosecurity Queensland.

### Have you seen these weeds?



#### *Opuntia cochenillifera* (cochineal cactus)

Cochineal cactus is a much-branched shrub to 7m tall with linear to narrowly obovate pads with numerous white glochids (barbed hair-like bristles) and showy pink flowers.

[Find out more](#)

## 2025

The Pest Animal and Weed Symposium (PAWS) is taking place from 19 - 22 May 2025 in Gladstone. PAWS 2025 is an opportunity to connect with people involved in pest animal and weed management from all over Queensland. This will be the third PAWS event, and marks the 50th anniversary of the Weed Society of Queensland - Invasive Species Queensland's precursor organisation.

To register, visit the [PAWS 2025 website](#).



## Monthly weed notifications

There were 2 weed notifications for March 2025.

[Find out more](#)



## Regional coordinator profile: Megan Leech



Megan Leech has worked as a Biosecurity Officer with Biosecurity Queensland since September 2019 in offices across South, Southwest and Central QLD. Megan made the switch to the Invasive Plants & Animals unit in September 2021 and thoroughly enjoys utilising her ecology background. Megan is program lead for the departmental Tropical Soda Apple (*Solanum viarum*) eradication program and enjoys addressing education and awareness in the agricultural industry. Megan is our regional coordinator for Darling Downs and Maranoa and can assist Weed Spotters in this region [megan.leech@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:megan.leech@daf.qld.gov.au).

## Emerging weeds to watch for in your region this month:

- [South East Queensland](#)
- [Burnett-Mary](#)
- [Queensland Murray Darling Region](#)
- [Condamine](#)
- [Desert Channels](#)
- [South West Queensland](#)
- [Fitzroy Basin](#)
- [Mackay-Whitsunday](#)
- [Southern Gulf](#)
- [Northern Gulf](#)
- [Dry Tropics](#)
- [Wet Tropics](#)
- [Cape York](#)
- [Torres Strait](#)

## New to the Weed Spotters Network?

Members of the Weed Spotters Network aim to detect and report new and emerging high-risk priority target weeds before they become established in Queensland. Are you ready to start spotting weeds in your region? [Download the Weed Spotters Handbook](#).

If you suspect that you have found a weed that is a [prohibited](#) or [restricted](#) ([Category 2](#)) [invasive plant](#), contact Biosecurity Queensland on **13 25 23**, email [photos to Queensland.Herbarium@gld.gov.au](mailto:Queensland.Herbarium@gld.gov.au) or contact your [Weed Spotters regional coordinator](#).



## Missed something?

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[Weed Spotters Network Queensland](#) is a joint project between the [Queensland Herbarium](#), the [Department of Primary Industries](#) and local governments with funding support from the Land Protection Fund.

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