

BIO-HAZARD

Opuntia spp.

Opuntia spp. (Prickly pear), native to North, Central and South America, has invaded many parts of the world including large portions of South Africa. Able to survive in arid to moist environments these plants pose a serious threat to the biomes of South Africa. *Opuntia aurantiaca* (jointed cactus), *O. ficus-indica* (sweet prickly pear), *O. imbricata* (imbricate prickly pear) and *O. stricta* (sour prickly pear) will be discussed below.

Identification

Description:

These species vary in size and form, however they all possess thorns. Figure 1 gives an indication of the growth form of four of the most serious species in the KNP.

Flowers:

The flowers vary in colour according to species. *O. aurantiaca*, *O. ficus-indica* and *O. stricta* have yellow flowers while *O. imbricata* has purple-red flowers.

Fruits:

The fruits occur as succulent berries. *O. aurantiaca*, *O. ficus-indica* and *O. stricta* have reddish-purple fruit while *O. imbricata* has yellow fruit.

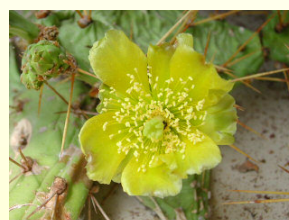
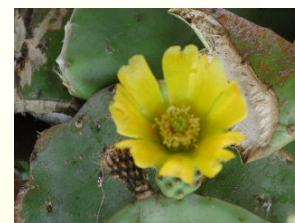


Figure 2: Clockwise from top left: Flowers of *O. aurantiaca*, *O. ficus-indica*, *O. imbricata*, *O. stricta*

Damage

Opuntia species invade savanna, grassland and karoo biomes and form thick, homogenous, impenetrable stands. They replace indigenous habitats and severely deplete natural biodiversity. *Opuntia stricta* has already invaded over 35 000 hectares around Skukuza.

Control

Chemical methods have been used to control *Opuntia* infestations, particularly isolated stands. However, there are a number of biological control agents that have proven effective in controlling *Opuntia* infestations.

Contact address

Please report any infestations of *Opuntia* plants in and adjacent to the Kruger National Park to:

Invasive Alien Species Unit
Private Bag X402
Skukuza
1350
Tel: (013) 735 4114 Fax: (013) 735 4051
E-mail: aliens@parks-sa.co.za

Figure 1: Clockwise from top left: *O. aurantiaca*, *O. ficus-indica*, *O. imbricata*, *O. stricta*

NB: Please send samples to IAS unit for proper identification and management suggestions

