

Protecting the world from harmful introduced species

People around the world can access information about harmful introduced species easier than ever thanks to the September 2006 launch of a new website for the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD). The world's premier source of free, authoritative information about introduced species that threaten native biodiversity and livelihoods now has improved content and functions.

While only a small proportion of the living organisms that are moved around the world with human activity and global trade actually cause harm, those that do can be devastating. Such "biological invasions" are now considered one of the biggest factors in biodiversity loss and extinctions. However, fighting back is possible provided communities and decision makers are aware of the threats and have access to information on what they can do about it.

"The Global Invasive Species Database alerts people to the causes and consequences of invasive species and provides practical information about effective prevention and management options. It helps protect natural resources and livelihoods," says Michael Browne from the Invasive Species Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN-The World Conservation Union.

The GISD, which has been on-line at www.issg.org/database since 2000 and mirrored by the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) of the US Geological Survey at www.invasivespecies.net/database, currently receives more than 900 unique visitors per day (50,000 hits per day).

It is also available in CD-ROM format, allowing people to access up-to-date, comprehensive invasive species information where internet access is restricted or non-existent. In keeping with the philosophy that anyone should be able to access information that can help them protect their environment, access to the GISD is free.

For more information, please contact Michael Browne at issg@auckland.ac.nz or phone +64 9 3737599 (x86814)

Examples of the harmful effects of some introduced species:

The brown tree snake has driven into extinction 9 out of 12 of Guam's native birds, effectively silencing their forests.

<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=54&fr=1&sts=sss>

Crazy ants in the Australian Christmas Island National Park are killing millions of land crabs and changing the entire ecosystem.

http://www.issg.org/database/species/distribution_detail.asp?si=110&di=16483&sts=

In South Africa's Lake St. Lucia Protected Area, the invasive introduced triffid weed changes the sex ratio of crocodiles.

http://www.issg.org/database/species/impact_info.asp?si=47&fr=1&sts=