

---

# Unpacking the controversies around the management and control of the invasive plant, *Rubus alceifolius*, in Réunion Island: preliminary elements for a sociological research

Cathleen Cybele\*<sup>2,1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement - Unité Mixte de Recherche Peuplements Végétaux et Bioagresseurs en Milieu Tropical (CIRAD UMRPVBMT) – 7 chemin de l'Irat, Ligne Paradis, 97410, Saint-Pierre, Réunion

<sup>1</sup>Université de la Réunion (UR) – 15, avenue René Cassin - CS92003 -97744 Saint Denis Cedex 9, Réunion

## Abstract

The perception of invasive plants by citizens is often overlooked in control programs. The management and control of *R. alceifolius*, the giant bramble, highly invasive in Réunion Island, triggered a great debate among the local community and contributed to diverging opinions about the invasive status of the plant. In 2008, a biological control agent, *Cibdela janthina*, a phytophagous sawfly was introduced to control *R. alceifolius* with approval from the French authorities here represented by the state, regional council, ministries, agencies and institutions. The omnipresence of the biological control agent, a blue-metallic looking fly around the island within a year's time did not go unnoticed and aroused great misunderstanding by the public. A high abundance of *C. janthina*, commonly called the "blue fly" raised uncertainties of its impact upon litchi honey production among beekeepers. This concern was broadcasted amongst the local community and it received great media attention. The local press published headlines expressing the opinion of beekeepers who voiced out their concerns on the decrease of their honey production to the French authorities. The controversy was reflected around the release of a biological control agent in Réunion island. The aim of this study was to determine the different perceptions of this biological control programme from the French authorities, the beekeepers and the research centre. The emergence of the transformation of disputes was selected to determine the rationale behind the controversies on the biological control programme. The available data analyzed were newspapers, scientific committee meetings reports, decrees and orders. Surveys were also undertaken to understand the various point of views which brought about disputes as part of the biological control programme. The results showed that weak communication and involvement of beekeepers prior to the release of the biological control agent have generated discontentment. The non-involvement of beekeepers during the scientific decisions later generated controversies. The research centre was requested to investigate on the issue of the reported decrease in honey production and concluded that *C. janthina* had no link with honey production. The research centre has later collaborated with professional beekeepers, as allies, to undertake the study.

---

\*Speaker

**Keywords:** beekeepers, biocontrol, media, perception