



Sophora chathamica

Common Name(s):

Kowhai, coastal kowhai

Current Threat Status (2012):

Not Threatened

Distribution:

Endemic. A primarily coastal species known from North, South and Chatham Islands but probably only indigenous to the northern half of the North Island, where it is common in the west from the Tongaporutu River to Te Pahi. In the east it is abundant south to about Thames, so far it has not been reported south and east of there. Very common around Auckland, the Hauraki Gulf and from Port Waikato south to Kawhia. There are some inland occurrences in the lower Waikato Basin. Disjunct occurrences around Wellington, the Chatham Islands and Whanganui Inlet may result from deliberate plantings by the Maori.

Habitat:

Primarily a species of coastal forest, often on cliff faces or banks overlooking estuarine rivers or inlets. Occasionally found in swamp forest.

Features*:

Tree up to 20 m tall, with one or more trunks. Branches spreading to upright. Juveniles weakly flexuose. Leaves on seedlings and juveniles moderately to densely leafy, 4.4-9 x 4.4-7.5 mm, orbicular to very broadly obovate, crowded, usually overlapping. Adult leaves up to 150 mm long, imparipinnate, usually pubescent, hairs, straight, appressed. Leaflets 25-55, crowded and overlapping, 6-16 x 4-8 mm, broadly elliptic, broadly obovate, broadly ovate, obovate to orbicular, distal leaflets usually smaller than proximal. Inflorescences racemose with up to 11 flowers. Calyx 8-10 x 10-13 mm, cupulate. Flowers yellow, keel petal blade 29-43 x 9-11 mm, wing petal blade 25-42 x 9-11 mm, standard petal blade 25-34 x 20-25 mm; petals with distinct claws 4-6 mm long. Fruit 50-180 mm long, 4-winged, brown, with up to 12 seeds. Seeds 5.5-8 x 4-.5. mm, oblong, elliptic to orbicular, yellow to light yellow-brown.

Flowering:

August-November

Fruiting:

October-September

Threats:

The main threat that faces all wild New Zealand kowhai species is the risk posed through planting for revegetation and horticultural purposes of hybrid material, foreign species, such as the Chilean Pelu (*S. cassioides*) and also of kowhai species outside their natural range. However, *S. chathamica* seems to be very common throughout its range, and is adequately protected within a range of reserves and land set aside for conservation purposes. The nativity of the Chatham Island populations is not clear, and though assumed to be planted by Maori, because this assertion needs further study and the trees are culturally significant they require direct management. Few (if any Chatham Island) plants can be said to exist in truly secure habitats.

*Attribution:

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (31 July 2004). Description adapted from Heenan et al. (2001).

References and further reading:

Anonymous. 1944. Kowhai. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin*, 9: 4-5

Heenan, P.B.; de Lange, P. J.; Wilton, A. D. 2001: *Sophora* (Fabaceae) in New Zealand: taxonomy, distribution, and biogeography. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 39: 17-53

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=1300



Caption: Waiwera River

Photographer: Gillian Crowcroft



Caption: Blind Jim's, Chatham Island

Photographer: Bill Clarkson