



Sonchus kirkii

Common Name(s):

Puha, shore puha, New Zealand sow thistle

Current Threat Status (2012):

At Risk - Declining

Distribution:

Endemic. Three Kings, North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.

Habitat:

Coastal. Usually on cliff faces in or around damp seepages where it often grows with the blue green alga *Nostoc* and fern *Blechnum blechnoides*. This species has a distinct preference for base rich rocks such as basalt, calcareous mudstones, siltstones, limestone or apatite-rich greywacke faces. On some offshore islands this species extends up into coastal scrub and herbfield. It occasionally grows on stabilised sand dunes. Indications are that this species once occupied a wider range of habitats but has retreated to those less suited to other faster growing introduced weeds.

Features:

Biennial to perennial herb (50-)150-600(-1000) mm tall. Taproot stout and swollen above. all parts exuding white latex when ruptured. Stem erect, simple or branched, finely grooved and ribbed, glabrous, hollow. Leaves thick, dull glaucous, lanceolate to narrowly oblong or linear oblanceolate (30-)80-200(-550) x (10-)30-60(-150) mm, margins dentate. Rosette and lower stem leaves pinnatifid to c.1/2 way to midrib; lobes broadly triangular, spreading or deflexed. Upper leaves not lobed, narrowly triangular to linear, or narrowly oblanceolate. Inflorescence cymose to umbellate. Capitula few to many. Involucre 10-15 mm, turbinate to cylindric, bracts imbricate, recurved at fruiting. Florets yellow. Achenes elliptic, brown, strongly flattened, (3-)4 x 1-1.8 mm, 3-ribbed on each face, winged, wings and ribs smooth. Pappus hairs, fine, white.

Flowering:

August - April

Fruiting:

September - June

Threats:

Appears to be declining over most of its range but especially in the North Island. The main threat seems to be from competition by faster growing weed species. Specifically there is some evidence that suggests it may be outcompeted by the introduced sowthistles *Sonchus asper* and *S. oleraceus* which grow faster, and thus can more quickly colonise the habitats preferred by *S. kirkii*. The species has also declined markedly along the south Wellington coast. Here it was once very common up until the mid 1980s subsequently it has disappeared from many of its former haunts, partly as a result of weed invasion and quarrying for rock, but it has also vanished from apparently stable, mainly indigenous habitats. The exact reason(s) for this loss are as yet unclear.

References and further reading:

Cameron, E.K. 2000. Native sow thistle *Sonchus kirkii* rediscovered in the Auckland region. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal*, 55, 21-24.

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=205



Caption: In cult. ex Awhitu.

Photographer: John Braggins



Caption: Ex cult. Kariotahi

Photographer: Gillian Crowcroft