



Atriplex australasica

Common Name(s):

Orache, saltbush

Current Threat Status (2012):

At Risk - Naturally Uncommon

Distribution:

Indigenous. Known in the South Island from a 1770 collection from the Marlborough Sounds, possibly from two 1860 collections made from south Canterbury by Haast and Kirk. However the species is abundant on the Chatham Islands. Also indigenous to the southern coast of Australia and Tasmania.

Habitat:

Strictly coastal. On the Chatham Islands it is usually found in open habitats such as along sand, shell, cobble or boulder beaches bordering the lagoon, on clay banks and cliff faces throughout the main island, particularly where near shag roosts, and commonly amongst sea-bird colonies and seal haul outs.

Features*:

Annual much-branched, grey-green, glaucous to red-green, monoecious (?gynodioecious) shrub up to 1 x 2 m. Main stems quadrangular, widely spreading to sub-erect, woody at base, otherwise firmly fleshy to succulent; deeply ribbed, stout up to 15 mm diameter, grey-green to glaucous at first becoming purple-red to maroon with age. Upper stems similar, though much branched, ribbed and more or less slender. Petioles stout, fleshy up to 20 mm long. Leaves 20-100 x 30-60 mm, grey-green, glaucous to red-green, very fleshy to almost succulent, broadly lanceolate, broadly-deltoid to broadly hastate, lamina of young plants more or less entire, usually with 1-2 deep forward projected lobes near base, these often present on one side, mature leaves entire or deeply though irregularly lobed to almost coarsely dentate, lobes broadly deltoid blunt ended, forward projecting; leaf-base broadly cuneate; apex obtuse, sub-obtuse to acute. Inflorescence leaves similar though smaller. Inflorescence long, spiciform, paniculate more or less arching and pendulous at fruiting. Flowers in dense glomerules, these at first continuous, become disjunct; upper glomerules usually subtended by small bract-like leaves. Male flowers with perianths 0.5-1 mm long; segments green with fine hyaline margin. Female flowers enclosed by bracteoles 1.5-1.8(-2) mm long at anthesis, sessile, rhombic-triangular to triangular hastate, usually entire, sometimes toothed or with protuberances. Fruiting bracteoles 3-4 x 2-5 mm, deltoid, fused near base, equal to subequal, entire or with 1-2 teeth, smooth or with warty protuberances, very fleshy, grey-green to glaucous at first becoming black and much-thickened with age, apices acute. Fruits dimorphic, enclosed within bracteoles, mostly 2.5-4 mm diameter, orbicular, laterally flattened, radicle basal, horizontal; pericarp loose, chartaceous often ruptured at fruit maturation. Testa glossy black, smooth.

Flowering:

November - April

Fruiting:

December - May

Threats:

Uncertain. Only recently rediscovered on the Chatham Islands where it is very common.

*Attribution:

Fact sheet and description prepared for the NZPCN by P.J. de Lange July 2007

References and further reading:

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 2009 Vol. 11 No. 4 pp. 285-309

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=708



Caption: Chatham Islands

Photographer: John Sawyer



Caption: Otauwe, Chatham island

Photographer: John Sawyer