



Polygonum plebeium

Common Name(s):

small knotweed

Current Threat Status (2012):

Data Deficient

Distribution:

Indigenous to Africa, India, Asia and Australia. In New Zealand there are historical (1860s) records from Great Barrier Island, and the Ruamahanga River (Wairarapa). It has also been collected in the 1940s-1950s from Lake Waikaremoana (where it is probably still present), and in the early 1990s from Lake Whangape near Huntly. In the South Island, despite Buchanans early, apparently unsubstantiated records, it was first definitely gathered in 1995 from Otematata, and has since been found in several other central Otago sites, where in places it can be common (B. Patrick pers. comm.).

Habitat:

Weed of dried lake, pond and river beds, salt and clay pans. Sometimes in roadside ditches.

Features:

Prostrate, annual to short-lived perennial, nearly hairless, grey-green, mat-forming herb. Stems < 15 cm long (rarely 30 cm long), angled, angles minutely hairy. Leaves grey-green to blue-green, unstalked (sessile), 3-9 x 0.5-1.5 mm, linear, linear-oblong or spatulate, with entire margins. Leaf midrib conspicuous, but lateral veins not evident. Ochreae (papery sheath encircling stems below leaves) 3 mm long, enclosing half of the internode between leaves, silvery-translucent, apex soon becoming lacerated. Flowers pink, axillary, in clusters of 1-5, stalks (pedicels) 0.5 mm long at flowering, usually enclosed by ochreae. Nut 1.2-1.7 mm, ovoid, dark brown or black, smooth, glossy 3-angled with ridges rounded.

Flowering:

October to April

Fruiting:

November to May

Threats:

Polygonum plebeium has been listed as Data Deficient because it seems to be genuinely scarce and it may be indigenous. Currently it is treated as naturalised in Flora 4, although even there it is suggested that it might be native. The issue is confused because the colonial botanist John Buchanan listed it (as *P. dryanderi*) as spreading rapidly from the Dunedin docks into parts of central Otago during the gold rush of the 1860s. Although his record does not seem to be substantiated by herbarium specimens, the majority of modern collections have come from Otago. Threats to the species are not immediately obvious, though it seems to have virtually died out in the North Island.

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=771



Caption: Lake Kiriopukae
Photographer: Graeme Jane



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