



Senecio kermadecensis

Common Name(s):

Kermadec fireweed

Current Threat Status (2012):

Threatened - Nationally Critical

Distribution:

Endemic to the Kermadec Islands where it has been reported only from Raoul and the nearby Meyer Islets. A specimen provisionally referred to *S. kermadecensis* from the Poor Knights Islands is best placed with *S. minimus*, which in New Zealand exists in two forms, a narrow-leaved form akin to the typical species, and a broad-leaved form, which is close to *S. kermadecensis* and appears to be a recent arrival to New Zealand from Australia. It is actively spreading in Northland. The Poor Knights collection is of that form.

Habitat:

A species of disturbed sites, requiring open or clear ground such as that created by active sea bird nesting grounds to flourish.

Features*:

Erect annual or short-lived perennial herb. Stems usually dark maroon-purple, sometimes green. Basal leaves usually withering at flowering, apetiolate or shortly petiolate, 40–100 × 10–40mm, broadly elliptic, grey-green to bright green, sparsely to densely hispid especially on lower surface, evenly and finely dentate with dentitions increasing in depth toward leaf base; mid-cauline leaves similar, apetiolate, 30–80 × 5–30mm, broadly elliptic to elliptic, uppermost leaves smaller and narrower with few remote teeth. Inflorescence corymbose. Supplementary bracts of involucre 0–3, 1–2mm long. Involucral bracts 5–8, glabrous, 4.5–5.5mm long. Ray florets 0. Disc greenish-yellow, c. 1.5mm diameter. Cypsela subcylindric, 2.0–2.5mm long, greyish-black, scarcely narrowed or constricted at apex, with 1–3 rows of hairs in grooves between broad ribs.

Flowering:

August to January

Fruiting:

October to April

Threats:

Recent field surveys suggest this species is now confined to the Meyer Islets, where it is very common over a small area.

Otherwise it seems to have gone extinct from Raoul Island over the last 30 years. The most likely cause of this decline seems to be the spread of the aggressive daisy *Ageratum houstonianum* Miller, which colonises the same open habitats the *Senecio* requires, is faster growing and seems to have displaced it from former and potential habitats on Raoul. *Ageratum* has now spread to the Meyer Islets, and eradication of this aggressive weed is unlikely due to the extreme vulnerability of the bird nesting grounds and burrows of those islands to collapse from human traffic.

*Attribution:

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 11 November 2008. Description based on Webb et al. (1988) supplemented with information obtained from fresh specimens and herbarium material.

References and further reading:

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ 1988. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. IV. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=92



Caption: Seedlings, North Meyer Island, Kermadec Islands. May 2011.

Photographer: Peter de Lange



Caption: Meyer islets, Kermadec islands

Photographer: Bec Stanley