

Biodiversity



Number 24

Shore spurge (*Euphorbia glauca*)

DESCRIPTION

Shore spurge is a succulent, creeping, herbaceous perennial (no woody stem above ground). It grows up to 1m tall with many erect stems, and spreads by underground rhizomes forming large patches. The soft, pale greyish-blue leaves are alternately arranged up the reddish stem. The flowers are small, dark red and occur in bunches at the end of each stem. The flowers are produced from October to February, and fruit from December to May. As with other Euphorbias, all parts of the plant exude a milky sap when damaged.



DISTRIBUTION

Shore spurge is endemic to New Zealand, and occurs throughout the North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands. While there are numerous colonies throughout NZ, they are generally small.

It is a coastal plant which colonises open sand dunes, preferring the more stable mid-dune, though can sometimes be found in the fore and rear dunes. It can also be found growing on coastal cliffs and gravel banks.

SHORE SPURGE IN TARANAKI

Historically, shore spurge was relatively common along the western and southern coast of Taranaki from the Sugar Loaf Islands to the Whenuakura estuary. There is also a colony along the north coast at Whitecliffs. In recent times, many of these small populations have disappeared or become highly degraded and vulnerable.

Private landowners, councils, and community groups such as Coast Care have been helping to re-vegetate many of our coastal dune systems. Shore spurge has been successfully reintroduced into many of these coastal areas.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Plant eco-sourced material to preserve our local form of shore spurge.
- Plant species such as pingao and spinifex to help stabilise the dune face.
- Fence off coastal dune areas to prevent access by vehicles and animals.
- Provide defined coastal access points for pedestrians.
- Control all brush weeds.
- Report all sightings of shore spurge to the Taranaki Regional Council Environment Services section.

See www.trc.govt.nz/shore-spurge-and-sea-spurge/



CONSERVATION

Shore spurge is a threatened endemic New Zealand species that is listed as 'at risk'. It is in decline nationally and is threatened in its normal habitat.

THREATS

- Trampling and browsing by domestic and feral cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and possums.
- Human and vehicle traffic on beaches.
- Coastal development.
- Coastal erosion.
- Fungal disease is affecting some populations on the West Coast of the South Island.
- Genetic pollution – with other 'non' local forms of shore spurge.
- Weed competition / suppression by brush weeds such as lupin.
- The exotic sea spurge, *Euphorbia paralias*, is a new potential threat and looks very similar to our native shore spurge. It has been found at at least one site in New Zealand.

QUICK FACTS

- Shore spurge has a white, caustic, poisonous sap (latex) that can burn and cause skin irritation. It is thought that the latex protects the plant from herbivores.
- Euphorbia is named after a Greek physician (Euphorbos) from about 2000 years ago. He was the first person to use the sap for medicinal purposes.



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