

Biodiversity



Number 28

Swamp Maire, Waiwaka (*Syzygium maire*)

DESCRIPTION

Swamp maire is a native tree that was once common in coastal and lowland swamps in Taranaki. It forms a medium-sized tree growing to a height of about 16m, with a compact canopy and often many trunks. The bark is pale, almost white, and is smooth and soft to touch. The thin, shiny yellow-green leaves often have small blisters and/or dark spots on the surface. The leaf margins are smooth and usually wavy, and leaves are arranged in opposite pairs. Swamp maire has evolved a specialized root system (pneumatophores, or breathing roots) enabling it to establish in areas of poor drainage. The powdery, orange-brown, peg-like roots extend above the soil surface to take in air, particularly where conditions are wet. A member of the Myrtaceae family, it has white rata-like brush flowers which appear through summer. The bright red berries provide a showy display. They are about 10mm in diameter, with each containing one seed. These usually appear in autumn, though can sometimes be found as early as January, and through into winter.

DISTRIBUTION

Swamp maire is endemic to New Zealand; it occurs in both the North and South Islands, extending as far south as Marlborough.

It was once common in semi-swamp forest and coastal and lowland swamp forest communities. It is also present in lower montane forest types in warmer parts of New Zealand, where high rainfall and poor drainage provide ideal conditions for it to establish. Due to land clearance and drainage, it is now quite scarce or absent over much of its former range.

Swamp maire is an early to mid-succession canopy species that is frost tender and shade intolerant. It requires high light levels, caused by some disturbance event such as tree fall, for new seedlings to establish.

SWAMP MAIRE IN TARANAKI

Historically, swamp maire was plentiful throughout Taranaki, growing on the margins of swamps and other poorly drained areas. Large stands of swamp maire were cleared with the draining of both the Ngaere and Rawhitiroa swamps in the 1890s. It was a dominant species in Taranaki swamp forest communities but is now restricted to isolated populations of ageing trees, with little regeneration.

Swamp maire has been recorded in many locations around Taranaki, extending from coastal to lower montane zones, with populations at the end of Norfolk Rd and York Rd within the boundary of Egmont National Park. Within the region its range extends from Tongaporutu in the north, around the Taranaki ringplain and as far inland as Lake Rotokare.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Do not drain damp areas such as swamps and wetlands. Fence and plant such areas to establish new swamp maire populations.
- Plant eco-sourced material to preserve our local form.
- Fence off areas of scrub and forest to prevent browsing by sheep, cattle and other wild animals.



CONSERVATION

Swamp maire is not a threatened or endangered plant. It is recognized as being regionally uncommon in the Taranaki region.

THREATS

- Land clearing, drainage and development.
- Browsing by domestic and feral cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and possums. Highly palatable to possums.

QUICK FACTS

- Original forest trees (prior to land clearance) were gigantic, with trunks up to 2m in diameter.
- The timber of swamp maire is very strong and durable. It was used for construction and was a popular firewood tree.
- The berries are edible.
- Maori used the bark of swamp maire to produce a blue / black dye for dyeing flax.



TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL
Environment Services
Ph: 06 765 7127 Fax: 06 765 5097
Email: info@trc.govt.nz
www.trc.govt.nz