

Coprosma acerosa

COMMON NAME

sand coprosma, tātaraheke

FAMILY

Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coprosma acerosa A.Cunn.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

COPACE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 44

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Sprawling yellowish small-leaved shrub inhabiting coastal areas. Twigs orange, slightly fuzzy at tip. Leaves narrow, small, with dark line down middle on the underside, in clusters of pairs scattered along twigs. Flowers tiny, with long protruding threads. Fruit white.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands

HABITAT

Coastal sands throughout distribution.

FEATURES

Low-growing, shrub with slender flexible, sprawling to prostrate, interlacing branches and branchlets, forming a more or less cushion-like mass up to 2 m across, and occasionally up to 2 m tall when supported (mostly low in stature). Branchlets numerous with orange-brown bark, pubescent when young. Leaves in opposite pairs or fascicles, on yellowish petioles. Stipules rounded-obtuse to broadly triangular, more or less pubescent, ciliolate, sometimes with 1 or more tiny dark denticles. Lamina coriaceous, yellowish green, linear obtuse, 7-12 x 1-1.5 (-2) mm. Midrib alone evident. Flowers solitary, terminal on short branchlets. Male flower with calyx non-existent or vestigial; corolla funnelform, lobes ovate-oblong, subacute, more or less equal to tube. Female flower with acute, narrow-triangular calyx-teeth; corolla funnelform, lobes narrow-oblong, obtuse. Drupe translucent, very pale to pale blue, often with darker flecks, globose, subglobose or broadly oblong, approximately 5-7 mm diameter.



Coprosma acerosa in fruit. Photographer: John Barkla



Piwhane / Spirits Bay, Te Pahi. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe

SIMILAR TAXA

Coprosma brunnea more open habit, less leaves, only found inland in South Island, not thought to overlap naturally due to habitat requirements.

Coprosma rugosa is a taller and much more upright shrub with stiff, erect branchlets.

Coprosma intertexta is bushy but not stiffly erect; the leaves are sharp-tipped in outline and usually red-margined.

Plagianthus divaricatus has alternate, not opposite, leaves or leaf clusters, dark brown bark and dark green leaves.

FLOWERING

(September-) October-November

FRUITING

February-March (-July)

LIFE CYCLE

Fleshy drupes are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

THREATS

Not Threatened but rapidly becoming scarce in large parts of its range. Seems to resent dune reclamation and competition from marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*).

ETYMOLOGY

coprosma: From the Greek kopros 'dung' and osme 'smell', referring to the foul smell of the species, literally 'dung smell'

acerosa: From the Latin acus 'sharp', meaning sharp or pointed

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Wilson & Galloway (1993) suggest prostrate forms known as *C. brunnea* do not represent a distinct species.

A natural hybrid exists, *C. acerosa* x *C. repens* which is known as *C. 'x Kirkii'* and is often for sale in commercial nurseries.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by M. Ward from Allan (1961) and Wilson & Galloway (1993).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan, H. H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. 1. Wellington: Government Printer. pg. 566-567.

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 11: 285-309

Wilson, H. D., & Galloway, T. 1993. Small-leaved shrubs of New Zealand. Manuka Press. pg. 108-110.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coprosma-acerosa/>