Euphorbia glauca

COMMON NAMES
shore spurge, sea spurge, waiu-atua, sand milkweed

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CI, DPS, DPT, PD, PF

Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Perennial herb with multiple erect stems up to 1 m tall and underground rhizomes. Stems reddish; leaves alternate, blue-green. Flowers in terminal bunches, each flower surrounded by a deep red cup-like structure with purple glands. Sap a burning milky juice. Flowers are produced from October to February and fruit occur from December to May.

SIMILAR TAXA
The milky sap distinguishes it from many other coastal herbs. The large cigar-shaped leaves and red cups around the flower-like inflorescences (‘cyanthia’) distinguish this species from other Euphorbia species.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic to New Zealand and the Chatham Islands.

HABITAT
Coastal cliffs, banks and talus slopes, sand dunes and rocky lake shore scarps.

THREATS
Domestic and feral cattle, sheep, pigs and possums are the major threats throughout this species range, mainly through browse and trampling. Competition from taller vegetation is significant at many sites. Coastal development (e.g., road widening) and erosion are further common threats to most populations. Population fragmentation makes the remnants vulnerable to sudden decline. Some populations on the West Coast of the South Island appear to have succumbed to a fungal disease.

GENUS
Euphorbia

FAMILY
Euphorbiaceae

AUTHORITY
Euphorbia glauca G.Forst.

SYNONYMS
None



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Euphorbia glauca. Photographer: Shannel Courtney, Licence: CC BY-NC.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September to March (sporadic flowering throughout the year can occur)

FRUITING
December to July

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Pappate cypselae are dispersed by wind and water (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed, cuttings and the division of whole plants.

ETYMOLOGY
euphorbia: After Euphorbus, a Greek physician who served King Juba of Numidia in 12BC. Juba named a cactus to honour Euphorbus and later Linnaeus named the entire genus after the physician.
glauca: Bloom has thin powder

NVS CODE
EUPGLA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 20

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD
2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD
2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD
2004 | Serious Decline
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: PF Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: CI, PF, RF, RR Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Benham, S. 2001. Field trip to Hauturu little Barrier island March 2001 and a few observations of Waiuatua shore spurge (*Euphorbia glauca*). Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 56: 10-43
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

ATTRIBUTION
Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/euphorbia-glauca/

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