

Plantago australis

COMMON NAME

swamp plantain

FAMILY

Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY

Plantago australis Lam.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE

PLAAUS

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Sparsely hairy herb with lance-shaped leaves lying close to the ground arising from a central point (like a dandelion), up to 30 cm long and 8 cm wide, with parallel veins, flower in centre of leaves, an up to 60 cm tall stem with a cylindrical flowerhead more than 10 cm long at the top, consisting of many small brown flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

Scattered throughout both islands, rare in the East.

HABITAT

Wetlands, water body and wetland margins, wet pasture, also occasional in dry sandy areas.

FEATURES

Hairy perennial herb with short stout caudex and numerous adventitious roots. Lvs all radical, few to many in the rosette; petiole usually 1-20 cm long, often purple, sometimes very short and ill-defined with woolly tuft at base. Lamina c. 2.5-30 × 7-8 cm, lanceolate, or obovate to broad-elliptic, hairy, especially beneath on the raised 5 or 7 main veins, entire or remotely dentate; base attenuate; apex obtuse. Scape c. 5-60 cm long, ± terete, densely hairy in upper part. Spike generally > 10 cm long at maturity, narrow-cylindric. Bracts usually slightly < sepals, ciliate, otherwise very similar to sepals. Sepals 2-3 mm long, broad-ovate, scarious except for central green or purple band, usually glabrous except for ciliate keel. Corolla tube = calyx; lobes 2.5-3 mm long, ovate, mostly soon curling involutely and forming a prominent, acute, erect, cone. Stamens glabrous, usually with small anthers and included (cleistogamous fls), sometimes with large, long-exserted anthers (chasmogamous fls). Style hairy, > corolla. Capsule 2.5-3.5 mm long, ovoid or ellipsoid-ovoid, 3-seeded. Seeds 1.8-2.2 mm long, ovoid-ellipsoid or oblong, generally deep olive green, sometimes brownish green or almost black (Webb et al., 1988).

SIMILAR TAXA

Most similar to broad-leaved plantain (*P. major*) which has much broader (up to 16 cm across) hairless leaves and narrow-leaved plantain (*P. lanceolata*) that is also hairless and has a much shorter flower head with a ribbed stalk.

FLOWERING

November to January



Miranda. Jan. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



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FLOWER COLOURS

Brown, White

FRUITING

Autumn

LIFE CYCLE

Seed dispersed by water, animals or contaminated machinery.

YEAR NATURALISED

1883

ORIGIN

Southern North America, Central and South America

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Unknown, seed or soil contaminant.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not controlled in New Zealand.

ETYMOLOGY

plantago: Old Latin name for flat-leaved plants

australis: Southern

ATTRIBUTION

Prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/plantago-australis/>