

Sonchus kirkii

COMMON NAME

puha, shore puha, New Zealand sow thistle

SYNONYMS

Sonchus asper var. *littoralis* Kirk, *Sonchus littoralis* (Kirk) Allan

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Sonchus kirkii Hamlin

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

NVS CODE

SONKIR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | At Risk – Declining

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | At Risk – Relict

2004 | Gradual Decline

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Three Kings, North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal. Usually on cliff faces in or around damp seepages where it often grows with the blue green alga *Nostoc* and fern *Blechnum blechnoides*. This species has a distinct preference for base rich rocks such as basalt, calcareous mudstones, siltstones, limestone or apatite-rich greywacke faces. On some offshore islands this species extends up into coastal scrub and herbfield. It occasionally grows on stabilised sand dunes. Indications are that this species once occupied a wider range of habitats but has retreated to those less suited to other faster growing introduced weeds.



Single plant. Photographer: Lisa Forester



Sonchus kirkii on Bluff track. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

FEATURES

Biennial to perennial herb (50-)150-600(-1000) mm tall. Taproot stout and swollen above. all parts exuding white latex when ruptured. Stem erect, simple or branched, finely grooved and ribbed, glabrous, hollow. Leaves thick, dull glaucous, lanceolate to narrowly oblong or linear oblanceolate (30-)80-200(-550) x (10-)30-60(-150) mm, margins dentate. Rosette and lower stem leaves pinnatifid to c.1/2 way to midrib; lobes broadly triangular, spreading or deflexed. Upper leaves not lobed, narrowly triangular to linear, or narrowly oblanceolate. Inflorescence cymose to umbellate. Capitula few to many. Involucre 10-15 mm, turbinate to cylindric, bracts imbricate, recurved at fruiting. Florets yellow. Achenes elliptic, brown, strongly flattened, (3-)4 x 1-1.8 mm, 3-ribbed on each face, winged, wings and ribs smooth. Pappus hairs, fine, white.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from all the other naturalised *Sonchus* species by the very large, glaucous, non-spinose leaves.

FLOWERING

August - April

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

FRUITING

September - June

LIFE CYCLE

Pappate cypselae are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Short-lived and best treated as an annual.

THREATS

Appears to be declining over most of its range but especially in the North Island. The main threat seems to be from competition by faster growing weed species. Specifically there is some evidence that suggests it may be outcompeted by the introduced sowthistles *Sonchus asper* and *S. oleraceus* which grow faster, and thus can more quickly colonise the habitats preferred by *S. kirkii*. The species has also declined markedly along the south Wellington coast. Here it was once very common up until the mid 1980s subsequently it has disappeared from many of its former haunts, partly as a result of weed invasion and quarrying for rock, but it has also vanished from apparently stable, mainly indigenous habitats. The exact reason(s) for this loss are as yet unclear.

ETYMOLOGY

sonchus: Sow thistle

kirkii: After Thomas Kirk (18 January 1828 - 8 March 1898), a NZ botanist and lecturer in natural sciences and regarded as a leader of botanical enquiry in NZ for over three decades. One of his most significant publications was Forest flora of NZ (1889) but he also contributed over 130 papers to the Transactions and Proceedings of the NZ Institute and other journals.

FURTHER STUDY

The relationship of this species to the Chatham Island endemic, monotypic genus *Embergeria*, and New Zealand endemic genus *Kirkianella* needs critical study.

ATTRIBUTION

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cameron, E.K. 2000. Native sow thistle *Sonchus kirkii* rediscovered in the Auckland region. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 55, 21-24.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/sonchus-kirkii/>