

July 2003

Pingao

WANGANUI CONSERVANCY

WHAT IS PINGAO?

Pingao (*Demoschoenus spiralis*) is a native sand-binding sedge that is unique to New Zealand.

It has a brilliant green, golden yellow or fiery orange colouring with stiff curled leaves. In spring, it sends up long flower heads with dark brown flowers arranged in a spiral around the stem.



Pingao lives in coastal areas, where it stabilises and builds sand dunes by trapping wind-blown sand around its base and in its leaves and roots.

PINGAO - A LOVE STORY

Pingao, a graceful daughter of Tangaroa, peered above the water one day and saw the tall and handsome Kakaho (toetoe), his golden crown nodding in the breeze. She grew sad and pined for him. Tangaroa took pity on Pingao but warned that if she left his domain she could not return. She left but the sand was very different from her cool home. She dug her feet deeper to find the cooler sand, but the wind beat her face and the birds picked her hair. Kakaho saw her delicate features and was impressed by her bravery. He shaded her from the sun, Ra, which blessed the couple and gave pingao her golden colour. Pingao and Kakaho are linked forever on tukutuku panels.

WHY IS PINGAO IMPORTANT?

Pingao, plays a vital role in preserving coastal areas because it holds dunes together and protects them from erosion. It also provides an environment where

other unique species, such as the endangered katipo spider, can develop and flourish. Its bright colours are highly-prized too for weaving and tukutuku work.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

WHY WE NEED YOUR HELP

The pingao is one of the few native sand dune plants left in New Zealand. Once a common sight at almost every sandy beach from North Cape to Stewart Island, populations of this special plant are now very rare.

WHAT IS THREATENING PINGAO?



Environmental threats such as fire, sand mining, coastal settlement, off-road vehicles, pest plants and browsing of dunes by stock and pests have wiped out pingao at many beaches. That's why we need your help to ensure its survival.

Motorcycles and four-wheel-drive vehicles in particular can cause incredible damage to fragile dune areas where pingao live. Introduced plant pests such as Marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) and lupin, used widely by farmers to stabilise dune lands, have also taken over many coastal areas and are a serious threat to pingao's survival.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Keep vehicles and stock out of dune areas where pingao grows.
- Plant pingao in coastal areas instead of introduced plants.
- Inform DOC of any threats to pingao.
- If you live near a coastal dune, be careful not to let weeds from your garden spread.
- Join or establish a coast care group in your area. The Department encourages local communities, councils and landowners to work together to protect and restore dune areas.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact:

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