

Atriplex cinerea

COMMON NAMES

grey saltbush

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Low greyish shrub of open coastal areas. Leaves semi-fleshy, grey, narrow, with white flecks on surface. Twigs reddish, covered in fine grains. Flowers and fruit inconspicuous, in leaf bases.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Sprawling, semi-erect, woody, heavily branched, leafy, dioecious or subdioecious shrub, forming mounds up to 1.5 × 4 m. Branchlets stout, rooting freely on contact with soil; stems at first ridged and angular, soon becoming terete and woody with age. All parts of young growth covered in a fine, scurfy, farinose pubescence; coalescing with age to form silvery white scurfy scales. Leaves 15–20 × 32–46 mm, linear-oblong, lanceolate, rarely weakly hastate, silvery grey, greyish white or occasionally pinkish grey, under surface with pale white, thickened midrib. Petioles short, 1–3 mm, stout, silvery white. Leaf surface ± mat, glabrous, cuticle soon cracking in an anastomosing pattern made up of ± circular scales; apex white slightly thickened, apiculate, apiculus pink, deciduous, 0.5–0.8 mm; base acute, attenuate, rounded or very rarely truncate; margin entire, lightly curved, occasionally sparsely glandular hairy near leaf base. Female flowers borne in leaf axils, either solitary, or in small axillary clusters, rarely forming axillary and terminal spikes. Female flowers occasionally found within the lower leaf axils of male plants. Perianth absent; bracteoles 2, 2 mm diameter, lower half fused, margins initially entire, either remaining so or developing appendages in fruit; stigmas 2, c.3 mm long, pink, filiform, slightly tapering, minutely plumose-papillate, ovary 0.35 mm, ovoid. Male inflorescence 30–140 mm long, conspicuous, dense, forming large interrupted or continuous oblong or obovoid spikes, these often paniced toward branch apices; glomerules 5–30 mm long, purple-green, pinkish red or wine-red. Flowers unisexual; perianth lobes 5, pink or wine-red, 1.7 mm long, obovate, apex sharply inflexed, cucullate, exterior towards apex with dense vesicular covering; stamens 5–6, filaments 0.8 mm long, white, anthers 0.8 mm long, broad-oblongate, pollen yellowish golden. Fruiting bracteoles sessile or shortly stipitate; stipe turbinate, woody; bracteoles ovoid to broadly deltoid or rhomboid, 6–10 mm long and wide, united towards base, corky or ± woody and swollen toward the centre and base, otherwise coriaceous with an entire margin; surface smooth or ornamented with verrucose appendages on one or both sides. Seed circular 3–4 mm diameter, testa chestnut-brown, smooth and glossy; radicle lateral, erect.

SIMILAR TAXA

None



Atriplex cinerea at Waimea Inlet, Nelson.
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Atriplex cinerea. Photographer: Tony Silbery,
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DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: South Island (Collected from Boulder Bank in Nelson in 1960 and DUrville Island in 1961, still present in the Waimea Estuary). Historically it occurred at Palliser Bay and Wellington. Also known from Australia, including Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal. On boulder beaches, within salt marshes, on barrier bar sand spits and shell banks.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

THREATS

Now known from just one natural population. It has also been successfully established in a number of sites around Nelson. Vulnerable to browsing animals and coastal erosion.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Amaranthaceae

AUTHORITY

Atriplex cinerea Poir.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

August - June

FRUITING

September - August

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Spongy nutlet dispersed by water and possibly also wind and granivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy to grow from cuttings. Plant layers itself producing adventitious roots off decumbent stems. Seed and cuttings may be collected at any time. Cuttings establish well in river sand. Plant grows well in full sun and wind in a gritty free-draining soil. Also grows well in soils with a high pH and bird manure.

OTHER INFORMATION

CULTIVATION

Occasionally offered by specialist native plant nurseries. Most commercial stock seen is female.

ETYMOLOGY

atriplex: From an ancient Latin name whose derivation is uncertain, but a possible explanation is the name comes from the Greek a- 'without' and traphein 'nourishment' because many of these species grow in arid desert soils

cinerea: Ash-grey

NVS CODE

ATRCIN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 54

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: SO

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: SO

2004 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange, P.J.; Murray, B.G.; Gardner, R.O. 1998: *Atriplex cinerea* (Chenopodiaceae) in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 36: 521–529.

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(4): 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Description modified from de Lange, et al. (2000).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Atriplex cinerea* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/atriplex-cinerea/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/atriplex-cinerea/>

PDF DATE

10 March 2025