

Biodiversity



Number 30

Saltmarsh Ribbonwood (*Plagianthus divaricatus*)

DESCRIPTION

Saltmarsh ribbonwood is a divaricating shrub commonly found growing on the edge of tidal estuaries and saltmarshes. It will grow to a height of about 2m, though it will often stay prostrate if growing on boulder beaches. It appears as a dark brown shrub, with tough, wiry, intertwining dark brown stems. The saltmarsh ribbonwood has distinct juvenile and adult stages, with the leaves of a juvenile plant being longer and broader. The adult leaves are inconspicuous, being dull green, small and narrow, and about 1cm long. They are deciduous (leafless in winter). The creamy white, scented flowers appear in spring, with male and female flowers on separate plants. The fawn-coloured fruit is a dry capsule, about 5mm in diameter, which splits open to release a single seed. The seeds float on water; and are sought after and often damaged by insects.

DISTRIBUTION

Saltmarsh ribbonwood is endemic to New Zealand. It occurs in the North, and South Islands, Stewart Island and the Chatham Islands. It is strictly a coastal plant, growing along the margins of salt marshes and estuaries near the top of the tidal range, in dune hollows, and in coastal gravels.

SALTMARSH RIBBONWOOD IN TARANAKI

It has been recorded growing at a number of river mouths and estuaries along the North Taranaki coast. A population has also been identified at the Patea River mouth. The New Plymouth District Council has planted saltmarsh ribbonwood in the wetlands on the western side of Lake Rotomanu in New Plymouth. This provides an example of their growth and habit.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Report all sightings of saltmarsh ribbonwood to Taranaki Regional Council Environment Services.
- Plant eco-sourced material to preserve our local form of saltmarsh ribbonwood.
- Fence off areas of coastal wetland, scrub and forest to prevent browsing by sheep, cattle and other wild animals.



CONSERVATION

Saltmarsh ribbonwood is not a threatened or endangered plant. It is recognized as being regionally uncommon in Taranaki.

THREATS

- Coastal development.
- Coastal erosion.
- Vegetation clearance.
- Weed invasion.
- Trampling and browsing by domestic and feral cattle, sheep, pigs and possums.

QUICK FACTS

- Male and female flowers occur on separate plants.
- The name ribbonwood refers to the inner bark, which can be separated into thin, lace-like layers.



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