Polygonum plebeium

COMMON NAME
small knotweed

SYNONYMS
Polygonum dryanderi Spreng., Polygonum aviculare var. dryanderi (Spreng.) Hook.f.

FAMILY
Polygonaceae

AUTHORITY
Polygonum plebeium R.Br.

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2017 │ At Risk – Declining │ Qualifiers: DP, SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2012 │ Data Deficient │ Qualifiers: SO
2009 │ Data Deficient │ Qualifiers: SO
2004 │ Data Deficient

Lake Kiriopukae. Photographer: Graeme Jane, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Lake Kiriopukae. Photographer: Graeme Jane, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island (historical (1860s) records from Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) and the Ruamahanga River (Wairarapa). It has also been collected in the 1940s–1950s from Lake Waikaremoana (where it may still be present), and in the early 1990s from Lake Whangape near Huntly), South Island (despite Buchanans early, apparently unsubstantiated records, it was first definitely gathered in 1995 from Otematata, and has since been found in several other central Otago sites, where in places it can be common (B. Patrick pers. comm.)). Also Africa, India, Asia and Australia.

HABITAT
Weed of dried lake, pond and river beds, salt and clay pans. Sometimes in roadside ditches.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Prostrate, annual to short-lived perennial, nearly hairless, grey-green, mat-forming herb. **Stems** < 15 cm long (rarely 30 cm long), angled, angles minutely hairy. **Leaves** grey-green to blue-green, unstalked (sessile), 3–9 × 0.5–1.5 mm, linear, linear-oblong or spathulate, with entire margins. **Leaf midrib** conspicuous, but lateral veins not evident. **Ochreae** (papery sheath encircling stems below leaves) 3 mm long, enclosing half of the internode between leaves, silvery-translucent, apex soon becoming lacerated. **Flowers** pink, axillary, in clusters of 1–5, stalks (pedicels) 0.5 mm long at flowering, usually enclosed by ochreae. **Nut** 1.2–1.7 mm, ovoid, dark brown or black, smooth, glossy 3-angled with ridges rounded.

SIMILAR TAXA

Polygonum plebeium can only be confused with another common knotweed *P. aviculare* L.. From this species it is best distinguished by the leaves lacking obvious lateral veins, and by the smooth and glossy nuts. It is usually a smaller plant but some recent collections suggest that size may be a function of local habit conditions.

FLOWERING

October–April

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

FRUITING

November–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Probably easy to grow from fresh seed and cuttings.

THREATS

Polygonum plebeium has been listed as Data Deficient because it seems to be genuinely scarce and it may be indigenous. Currently it is treated as naturalised in Flora IV, although even there it is suggested that it might be native. The issue is confused because the colonial botanist John Buchanan listed it (as *P. dryanderi*) as spreading rapidly from the Dunedin docks into parts of central Otago during the gold rush of the 1860s. Although his record does not seem to be substantiated by herbarium specimens, the majority of modern collections have come from Otago. Threats to the species are not immediately obvious, though it seems to have virtually died out in the North Island.

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ATTRIBUTION

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/polygonum-plebeium/