Senecio sterquilinus

COMMON NAME
guano groundsel

SYNONYMS
Senecio lautus var. γ macrocephalus Hook.f.

FAMILY
Asteraceae

AUTHORITY
Senecio sterquilinus Ornduff

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 40

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2017 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: RR

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2012 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: RR
2009 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: RR
2004 | Range Restricted

Western reef. Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Western Reef. Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island, South Island and Chatham Islands. Known from Stack H (Mokohinau Islands group), Hawke's Bay (extinct), Matiu/Somes Island, Makaro/Ward Island, Brothers Island and Stephens Island in the Cook Strait. Also on the West Coast from Cape Foulwind south to Point Elizabeth. Around Wellington Harbour this species is occasionally seen at Petone Beach and Evans Bay. On the Chatham Islands it has been recently (2006) collected from the Forty Fours, Sisters and Western Reef.

HABITAT
A strictly coastal species usually found growing in the vicinity of sea bird nesting grounds or seal haul outs. Often found growing out of thick guano deposits on sparsely vegetated rock stacks dominated by sea birds.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Annual to short-lived perennial, subsucculent, fleshy to succulent herb, forming densely branched, somewhat sprawling plants up to 0.6 × 0.6 m. **Stem** base woody, purple-red or purple, glabrous, rest of stem purple, purple-green or green, sparsely covered with cobwebby hairs. **Leaves** fleshy, subsucculent to succulent, sparsely to moderately cobweb-hairy, especially on the undersides, often more densely so on emergent leaves, becoming glabrate to glabrous, cuneately narrowed to seed, amplexicaul, 30–200 × 10–80 mm, dark green and glossy above, paler green or purple-green below, elliptic to ovate or rhomboid, usually pinnately lobed to pinnatisect with very broad pinnately lobed or deeply toothed segments, rarely crenate to entire. Uppermost leaves similar but smaller, usually less divided, base shortly and broadly cuneate, amplexicaul. **Supplementary bracts and calycular bracteoles** 9–30, 1.5–8 mm long. **Involucral bracts** 13–21, glabrescent to glabrous, 6–12 mm long. **Ray florets** 13–28; ligules dark yellow, closely spaced or overlapping, 3–10 mm long. **Disc** yellow 10–25 mm diameter. **Cypsela** 2.5–3.0 mm long, dark brown, dark purple-brown to black-brown, narrowly oblong to narrowly oblong-elliptic, scarcely narrowed at apex, base cuneate; ribs broad and rounded; grooves narrow to u-shaped; hairs retrorse in 4–10 rows filling grooves, often obscuring ribs as well. **Pappus** 5–6 mm long, white, caducous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Senecio lautus Willd. is frequently sympatric with *S. sterquilinus* and could be potentially be confused with it. From *S. sterquilinus*, *S. lautus* differs by its usually smaller growth habit, finer more divided leaves, and fewer involucral bracts (up to 15, mostly 10–13 cf. up to 25, mostly 18–21), and somewhat smaller seeds (2.2–3.0 cf. 2.5–3.0). Both species are clearly closely related, have the same chromosome number (2n = 40) and putative hybrids have been collected. On the Chatham Islands *S. sterquilinus* has been found growing with the endemic *S. radiolatus* F.Muell. subsp. *radiolatus* from which its distinction can be difficult, particularly with glabrescent forms of *S. radiolatus*. From that species *S. sterquilinus* differs by its smaller, more widely spreading habit, very fleshy/succulent glabrescent leaves which lack lanate hairs, greater number of ray florets 13–28 cf. 10–20.

FLOWERING

July–June

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

FRUITING

July–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. A strict annual which thrives in very fertile (high N, P, K) damp soil in full sun. This species, along with *S. radiolatus* F.Muell was trialled in annual flower beds in parts of Lower Hutt during 1991, it was very succesful and popular with the public. The large, yellow flower heads often completely cover the plant.

THREATS

A vulnerable herb of very restricted and probably relict distribution. Abundant at most of its known localities and seemingly dependant on sea bird guano to thrive. This makes it very vulnerable to any decline in nesting/roosting sea birds.

ETYMOLOGY

senecio: From the Latin senex ‘old man’ (probably referring to the bearded seeds)

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 November 2008. Description based on Webb et al. (1988) supplemented by observations obtained from fresh specimens and herbarium material

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ 1988. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. IV. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/senecio-sterquilinus/