

Small Scurf-pea

Cullen parvum (formerly *Psoralea parva*)

A Threatened Species of the Grassland Community

Description

Small Scurf-pea (*Cullen parvum*) is a trailing or ascending perennial herb with a woody rootstock that can reach more than 80 cm underground. Its thin wiry stems can be up to 50 cm long and rarely live for more than nine months of the year. New stems re-sprout from the rootstock every spring.

The lance-shaped leaves sprout from the stems in groups of three. They are generally up to 25 mm long by 8 mm wide.

The flowers begin to appear in October and can persist until April. They vary in colour from bluish-pink to lilac. Seed production can continue over an extended period if adequate soil moisture is available.



Illustration:
Miles Geldard

Distribution

Although the species was considerably more widespread in the past, there are now only eight known populations of Small Scurf-pea in Victoria. (Many of the records on the distribution map are 50 to 100 years old and are now extinct.) The species is also known to occur in South Australia and New South Wales. The main stronghold of the species in Victoria is in the Barmah State Park and State Forest.



Source: Flora Information System, DSE 2004



Photo: Miles Geldard

Small Scurf-pea (*Cullen parvum*)

Habitat

The species grows in grasslands and grassy woodlands. These sites are subject to irregular flooding, and have relatively rich soils derived from alluvium. An exception is the population near Shelford, which grows on rocky clay soils derived from basalt.

Better Management

Small Scurf-pea is a highly palatable plant to grazing animals. To maintain or increase the population size of Small Scurf-pea and sustain seed production and carbohydrate reserves, grazing should be limited during spring and summer.

Conservation status

Small Scurf-pea is classified as 'Endangered' under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (the 'FFG Act').

Similar species

Small Scurf-pea is similar in appearance to Tough Scurf-pea (*Cullen tenax*), a native, and Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), a weed.

Tough Scurf-pea has leaves in groups of 5 or 7 (opposed to 3 on Small Scurf-pea). Strawberry Clover has leaves that are larger and rounder in shape.

Decline and threats

The decline in Small Scurf-pea is a direct result of habitat loss. Existing populations are currently being threatened by weed invasion; a continual high level of grazing; and a lack of biomass reduction, ie, other native species out-competing Small Scurf-pea for light and soil nutrients.



Tough Scurf-pea. Photo: Viridans Biooical Database



Strawberry Clover. Photo: Viridans Biooical Database

Why are threatened species important?

- Conservation of biodiversity is essential to maintaining ecosystem processes such as nutrient cycling, carbon dioxide / oxygen balance and control of pests and diseases, all of which underpin the economic viability and sustainability of our primary industries
- Currently we rely on about 20 plant species to feed the majority of the world's population - the conservation of the wild plant gene pool is essential to supplement the narrow genetic base of these food crops, providing disease resistance, improved productivity, and environmental tolerance
- Biological diversity is an intrinsic part of the aesthetic qualities in many areas valued in Australia for tourism and recreation
- Extinction is forever...



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