

# Stiff Groundsel

*Senecio behrianus*

A Nationally Threatened Species of the Grassy Wetland Community

## Description

Stiff groundsel (*Senecio behrianus*) is an erect, short, woolly perennial forb or shrub, usually 15 to 30 cm high but possibly up to 100 cm high. The leaves are grey-green in colour and about 25 mm long.

Flower heads are yellow, with 6-8 mm long 'petals' and a yellow centre, blooming between January and May. Seeds are dark brown, flattened, 1-2 mm long and crowned with a tuft of numerous feathery bristles.

## Distribution

Stiff Groundsel is found only in South-eastern Australia. Historical records kept at the Royal Botanic Gardens Herbarium in Melbourne indicate that the plant was once widespread across the Murray-Darling Basin, where it grew on seasonally inundated areas with sandy or sandy clay soils.

At present Stiff Groundsel is only known to exist at five wild populations, four at Corop and one near Ballarat.



Source: Flora Information System, DSE 2004



Stiff Groundsel. Photo: John Eichler



Stiff Groundsel regrowth on an irrigation channel bank.  
Photo: Ben Thomas

# Stiff Groundsel (*Senecio behrianus*)

## Habitat

Due to the small number of known wild populations, the known habitat requirements of Stiff Groundsel are limited to generalisations at this point in time.

The populations of Stiff Groundsel at Corop grow on soils usually originating from lake deposits or 'swampy soil', consisting of poorly drained grey clays and sandy clays.

The recently discovered population at Ballarat is growing on basalt-derived cracking clays in an area that, until recent years, has periodically flooded.

## Conservation Status

Stiff Groundsel was presumed extinct until it was re-located at Corop in 1991. The plant is now listed as 'Endangered' under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the 'EPBC Act') and is also listed as 'Endangered' under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (the 'FFG Act').

## Decline and Threats

The decline in Stiff Groundsel can be attributed to the clearance of required habitat and/or a change in the flooding regimes of existing potential habitat. Therefore it is important to protect the remaining Stiff Groundsel habitat.

The known populations of Stiff Groundsel are heavily invaded by weed species. Because of this, broad scale herbicide use is a threat to the survival of Stiff Groundsel. At this stage, DSE believes that periodic controlled burning at an appropriate time of the year is the best way to manage weed species in these areas.

Because some populations of Stiff Groundsel can be found on roadsides and the banks of irrigation channels, maintenance of this infrastructure is also a potential threat.



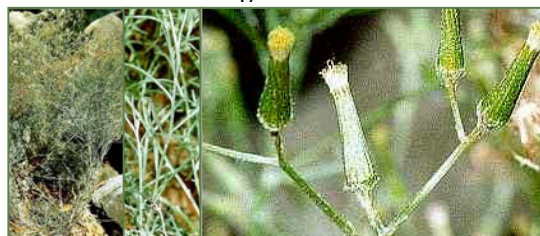
## Similar species

Stiff Groundsel is most similar to two other plants of the *Senecio* genus. These are Branching Groundsel (*Senecio cunninghamii*) and Cotton Fireweed (*Senecio quadridentatus*). The noticeable differences being that these two plants generally grow much taller than Stiff Groundsel.



**Branching Groundsel (*Senecio cunninghamii*)**

Photo: Viridans Biological Database



**Cotton Fireweed (*Senecio quadridentatus*)**

Photo: Viridans Biological Database

## Why are threatened species important?

- The sheer diversity of life is of inestimable value – many biologist now believe that ecosystems rich in diversity are more resilient and able to recover more quickly from stresses such as drought or human-induced degradation
- Ecosystem maintenance – the complex nature of ecosystem relationships means that the removal or disturbance of one part of the ecosystem could affect the functioning of many other components – our knowledge of these relationships is incomplete, so the results of loss or disturbance are unpredictable
- Because of our continent's long isolation from other landmasses, many of our species are found nowhere else
- Extinction is forever...