

NORTHERN RATA

FACT SHEET



(This fact sheet was compiled from information in McKessar, K. and Sawyer, J. 1999: Northern rata (Metrosideros robusta) in Wellington Conservancy)

Northern Rata (*Metrosideros robusta*)

Northern rata is well known throughout North Island's coastal to lower montane forests and extends southwards as far as Hokitika. It is abundant in forests from North Cape southwards to north-west Nelson and Westland.

Northern rata requires plenty of light and it usually begins life as an epiphyte (a perching plant), high in the canopy of a suitable host tree. However it can also grow from the ground.

Rata that germinate on the ground grow into trees with normal but often short trunks, whereas rata grown as an epiphyte has a trunk composed of fused roots.

Occurs from sea level to a maximum of 900m.

Roots

Rata, like its relative, pohutukawa, have the ability to sprout root systems as and where needed.

These adventitious roots form out of trunks and branches; they extend down the trunk and are able to grow in air over surfaces as they search for crevices, pockets of soil and moisture.



About Project Crimson

It seems hard to believe but 25 years ago the future of pohutukawa looked bleak. Possums were out of control and in some parts of the country up to 90% of coastal pohutukawa stands were gone. Led by a bunch of enthusiastic and committed volunteers, Project Crimson set out to replant areas of the Northland coastline that were depleted of pohutukawa. Such was the success that over the years that mandate broadened to a national focus, to include rata, and more recently a wider ecosystem approach.

At the heart of Project Crimson however remain our four hero species: mainland pohutukawa and the tree rata – northern, southern and Bartlett's - as these are the most threatened by possums and people. Project Crimson advocates for these species and has undertaken extensive research into the health of *Metrosideros* (the species to which pohutukawa and rata belong).

Wood

The wood is reddish brown with a twisted grain due to the nature of its growth, usually germinating high in the canopy of other trees and sending roots to the ground. The many thickening roots encircle the host's trunk, fusing together over the centuries to form a huge trunk inside which the original host tree decays.

Hard, slow growing, dark red heartwood.

Bark

Rough and stringy forming a medium-thick, dry covering capable of protecting the tree from drought. The gnarled bark of the rata allows many other plants to cling to and perch on its branches throughout its long life.

Leaves and shoots

2-4 cm in length. The leaves are small and leathery in texture with rounded indented tips.

Flower colour

The flowers are crimson to dark red.

Flowers between November – January depending on location and weather patterns.

Stamen

Approximately 3cm.

Fruit/seed capsules

Medium sized capsule with 10 to 15 in a bunch. Bright green when young.

Fruits mature in autumn to early winter.



Mature trees

Northern rata grows to a height of 25m - 30m, with a lower trunk of up to 3m in diameter. This forest giant is one of New Zealand's tallest flowering trees. It typically has wide spreading branches with billowy layers of foliage.

Growth rate

Slow.

How old

To 1000 years.

Ecosystem

Plants:

The foster tree of epiphytic rata is usually rimu. Rata is usually found in hardwood, podocarp and beech forests. It is associated with such species as kauri, rewarewa, tawa, hinau, kamahi, kohekohe, pukatea and mahoe. Ferns, lilies, orchids, shrubs and even small trees live in the rata canopy.

Insects:

A major source of nectar for honey bees, and pollen for native bees.

Birds:

Kaka, tui and bellbirds feed on nectar. Many birds nest in the hollow trunks.

Animals:

Bats and lizards feed on the flowers.