

SOUTHERN RATA

FACT SHEET



Southern Rata (*Metrosideros umbellata*)

Best suited to cooler, high rainfall regions this rata grows particularly along the South Island's West Coast but is the most widely spread of all New Zealand rata ranging from small trees on high Northland and Coromandel outcrops to the subantarctic Auckland Islands where it forms the country's southernmost forests.

Occurs from sea level to 760m.

Roots

Rata, like its relative, pohutukawa, has the ability to sprout root systems as and where needed. These adventitious roots form out of trunks and branches; and are able to grow in air over surfaces as they search for crevices, pockets of soil and moisture.

Wood

Dense and strong, as needed to withstand wind damage and drought; hard, very heavy, dark red heartwood; slow growing.

Bark

Rough and flaky forming a medium-thick, dry covering capable of protecting the tree from drought; and excellent surface for its own aerial roots and the roots of epiphytes (an epiphyte stores water for itself and its host).



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).

Leaves and shoots

3-6 cm long. Leaf is sharply pointed.

Flower colour

Scarlet. Occasional white or yellow.

Flowers between December and February depending on location and weather patterns.

Stamen

Approximately 2cm.

Fruit/seed capsules

Largest capsule of the three, being around 0.75 - 1 cm per individual capsule. Up to 6 in a bunch. Bright green when young. Fruits require a year to mature.

Mature trees

Grows to around 15 m high or more, with a trunk diameter up to 1m, sometimes much larger, sometimes sprawling rather than upright.

Growth rate

Slow.

How old

Can reach 500 years old on glacial moraine.

Ecosystem

Plants:

Mainly beech forest, podocarps and kamahi.

Insects:

A major source of honey on the West Coast, several scale insect species on leaves.

Birds:

Nectar for kaka, tui and bellbird.

Animals:

Roosts for bats on southern islands.