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**Regeneration of the native sand dune plant
Pimelea arenaria in the lower North Island, New
Zealand**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Science
in**

Ecology

**at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand**

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2003

Abstract

New Zealand has 300,000 ha of coastal sand dunes in which many native species and introduced plant and animal species are established. One native plant inhabiting dune ecosystems is *Pimelea arenaria* (Thymeleaceae), the native sand daphne, which is gynodioecious with female and hermaphrodite flower types and listed as nationally declining. The cause of the decline is unknown, but anecdotal evidence suggests recruitment failure is occurring. This thesis looked at four *P. arenaria* populations in the lower North Island of New Zealand. The aims were (1) examine the population structure and establish whether recruitment failure was evident, (2) whether any failure was due to problems with pollination, and (3) whether house mice (*Mus musculus*) or birds had any impact on *P. arenaria* by removing fruit.

The *P. arenaria* populations ranged from 0.53-4.05 plants/ha, with female plants comprising the smaller portion of each population, the exact sex ratios varying between the sites. The standing crop of nectar of hermaphrodite flowers is modest and varies from 24 to 56 $\mu\text{g}/\text{flower}$. The pollen:ovule ratio (1987: 1), as well as casual observations, suggest that insects are the main pollen vectors. Recruitment failure in *P. arenaria* occurred with few or no seedlings found at any site, the maximum height above substrate and the surface area of substrate covered suggesting an adult biased population. Profuse flowering occurred (360-510 flowers/ m^2), leading to viable seed from both female and hermaphrodite plants. Less than 50% of seed germinated from either flower type, regardless of pollination method (natural, hand out-crossed, or autonomously selfed). Female plants observed higher germination success in seeds in both hand out-crossed and natural pollination. *P. arenaria* seed weight remained constant between sexes and treatments, however the pulp weight was variable, with hermaphrodite autonomously selfed fruit having the smallest amount of pulp, but this was not significant ($p=0.37$).

Graded exclosures showed that fruit was removed but this was preventable by bagging the fruit ($p<0.001$). However, the results from the exclosures were unable

to distinguish between mice and birds suggesting that both have similar, possibly cumulative, effects on fruit loss. Within the bagged fruit there were peaks of fruit loss at the start and end of the fruiting season suggesting that selective abortion of ovules is occurring, possibly because of low abundance of pollen sources or pollen vectors. Fruit loss occurred, but there was no direct field evidence of predation by mice and birds. A feeding trial with mice established that both female and male mice eat and destroy *P. arenaria* fruit and seed, and at a low dose rate (3 fruit/mouse) the fruit of *P. arenaria* was not poisonous.

Areas for future work are discussed for each section.

Acknowledgements

To God who gave me the abilities I have, who helped me and carried me through this thesis, and without whom nothing could have been accomplished.

To my Mother, Father, and my sister Rowena for all their support and help throughout my university career and especially through the thesis year.

To my supervisors: A/Prof Robin Fordham, whose kindness and patience never faltered, Dr Gill Rapson, who will never be the same after being subjected to my english (or lack there of), although my english has now vastly improved as a result. And Dr Alastair Robertson who preparatory skills helped me survive the ordeal of presenting my research to a wider audience.

To the many other staff members of Massey University who have provided help during this thesis. Especially Jens Jorgenson (Ecology Dept), for his much appreciated technical help with the exclosure frame work, Dr Ian Henderson for his help with SYSTAT and statistics. To Mr Peter van Essen for his ideas regarding the design of the exclosure frames, Barbara Just (Ecology Dept), whose help with technical support and her smile smoothed the way enormously and to the Ecology secretaries particularly Erica whose little tips in using Microsoft Office saved much frustration. Thanks are also due to Craig McGill (Seed Technology) whose advice regarding the germination of *P. arenaria* seed was invaluable. To Carlos Lehnbach who provided advice for calculating nectar amounts. And to Prof. Patrick Hesp (Geology Dept) who provided advice on site location and also knowledge of the general geological processes of sand dunes in the Manawatu. Grateful thanks are also extended to the Animal Ethics Committee, chaired by Professor Hugh Blair, who gave permission for the feeding trial to proceed.

To staff of the Department of Conservation who have been involved and aided this project from its inception, especially Dr John Sawyer (Wellington), Dr Astrid

Djikgraaf (CAS Whanganui), Gary Foster (Masterton Area Office), Jim Campbell (Whanganui Area Office), Tony Roxburgh (Waikato Area Office), and Viv Nicolls (Palmerston North Area Office).

Many thanks are also due to Colin Ogle and Colin Burrows who proved readily approachable and who expressed great interest and provided valuable advice and assistance during my thesis

And of course to all my friends both in the University and out side with whom many, many wonderful memories have been forged and who will never be forgotten. I would especially like to thank Clare Brown, Rebecca Boulton, Dorothee Dupoix, Anna Grant, Bekky Lewis, Yvan Richards, Nikky Pindour. All whom are my valued and esteemed colleagues of the Wildlife Ecology Lab who kept me on the straight and narrow and who made research that much more fun than it would have been otherwise. Also Rownea Teal and her folks who looked after my exclosure frames at Castlepoint, gathered density data, and also fed me when the need arose.

Ich möchte auch Kristina Salzer und Herr Doktor Billy Badger danken. Ich habe Deutsch gelernt und ich habe auch meine Vernunft behalten. Ich bin jetzt eine besser Person. Eine Tage wurde ich nach Deutschland fliegen und ich wurde Sie helfen.

Undoubtedly I will have accidentally missed someone and for this I am truly sorry, it was certainly not my intention to leave anyone out. All I can say to everyone, both named and unnamed, is THANK YOU.

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