Two African daisies

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It has been estimated that on average a new weed establishes itself in New Zealand every 18 days. An embarrassingly large number of these are escapees from gardens. What is not easy to explain is why so many species sit meekly within garden fences for decades after their introduction to New Zealand horticulture, and then one day, for no obvious reasons, launch themselves into a rural invasion.

Helichrysum petiolare is a sprawling South African climber cultivated for its very pale, greyish, almost white foliage (Fig. 1). (There is a cultivar 'Limelight' with pale greenish yellow leaves.) It's not rare in gardens but could hardly be described as common either. You might have seen it used to advantage in hanging baskets contrasting with colourful flowers such as *Lobelia*. The usual common name seems to be liquorice (licorice) plant, perhaps because of the scent of the crushed leaves, although it is not very convincing to my nose. Botanically it is unrelated to the real liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), which is a legume (Fabaceae). *Helichrysum* and its relatives (e.g. *Gnaphalium, Anaphalis, Anaphalioides, Ozothamnus, Craspedia, Leucogenes, Raoulia, Pseudognaphalium, Xerochrysum, Ammobium)* belong to the tribe Gnaphalieae of the daisy family Asteraceae (sometimes still known by its older name Compositae).

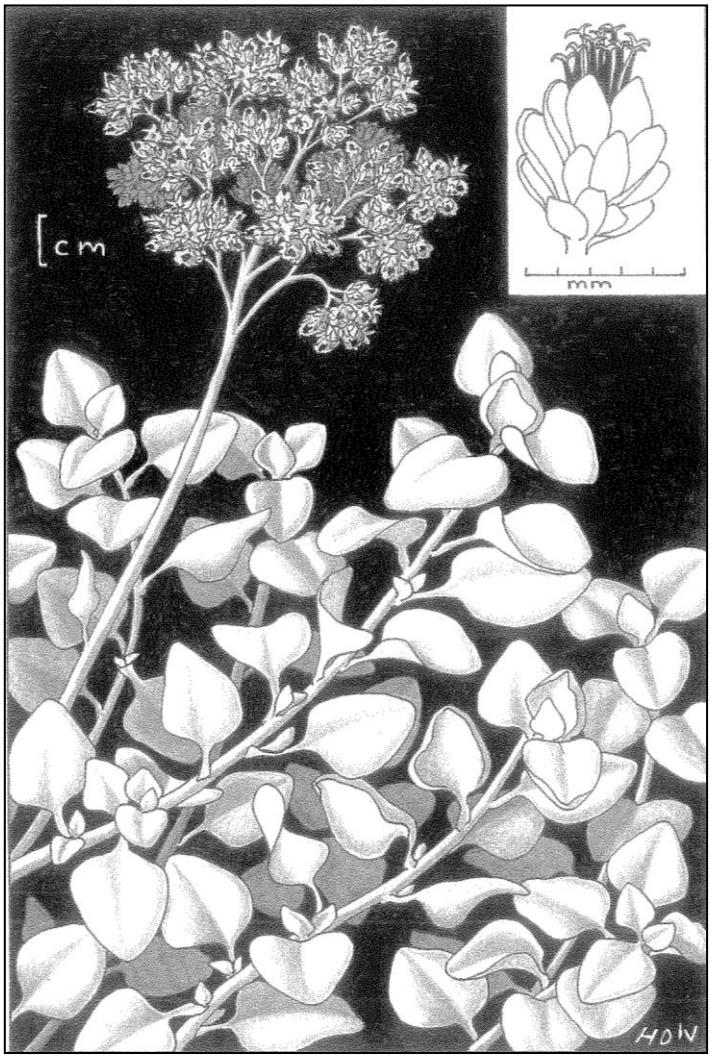

Figure 1 The sprawling South African climber *Helichrysum petiolare*. Original drawing by the author.

Helichrysum petiolare gets no mention in Volume 4 of the *Flora of New Zealand* (Webb et al. 1988), which deals with pteridophytes, gymnosperms

and dicots known to be more or less naturalised in this country by the time of publication. However, in a checklist of additional records 1988 – 1993 (Webb et al. 1995), the species is included as a new record: "Known from two sites only, Kerikeri (Northland) and Linden (Wellington)." Peter de Lange's collection of it from Kerikeri in January 1991 is the first record of the species wild in New Zealand. The paper also notes: "A cultivated species probably established in the wild from garden discards and spreading from there by layering. Both the grey-leaved typical form and a cultivar 'Limelight' with greenish yellow leaves are grown, and it is this cultivar that is now wild. The species can seed freely in cultivation when more than one clone is present".

In late March 2006 my neighbour on Banks Peninsula, John Sage, who farms at the head of the Goughs Bay Valley, found a patch of the liquorice plant spreading rampantly over his gorse. I walked with him to the site and identified the plant for him, suggesting that it would probably be best deleted. He zapped it soon afterwards with Tordon spray. In May 2010 John found another patch, about 600 metres away from the first. He zapped that too. The nearest homestead is Kendale, about half a kilometre away from both sites, but I have not yet ascertained whether liquorice plant is grown in the garden there. The plant definitely *is* grown in a few gardens in Akaroa, about 6 km away as the tui flies, and over a big hill.

I kept my eyes open for it on Hinewai Reserve. The silvery white foliage hardly makes good camouflage. In March 2014 we found a luxuriant patch sprawling over a huge pine bole in our felled plantation near Stony Bay Saddle, where we make periodic skirmishes against wilding *Pinus radiata*.

Bill Sykes told me that there were cultivated plants in Orton Bradley Park above Charteris Bay, Lyttelton Harbour, but that he had more or less eradicated the species there after he observed it "spreading fairly fast". He commented that he had seen it grown as a ground cover in Governors Bay. He also informed me that the Department of Conservation now lists the species as a weed, anxious about its potential to spread in a number of localities, including the Chatham Islands.

So it seems to be a species on the move, and one to watch. Finding the base of the plant, cutting it to the ground, poisoning the cut base with glyphosate (say, 1:4 glyphosate:water), and making sure that the cut material dries out without contacting the ground, seems to thwart it.

While I was biking homewards along the Rail Trail in May 2014, I found another African member of the daisy family at Catons Bay (Wairewa / Lake Forsyth), one with which I was familiar in Christchurch City where it is common, but which I had not noted before on Banks Peninsula. This is the gravel groundsel, also known as fireweed (along with a number of other native and naturalised groundsels). Volume 4 of *The Flora of New Zealand* calls it *Senecio skirrhodon*, but notes that *S. skirrhodon* is possibly no more than a maritime form of *S. madagascariensis*, which is the name we should probably use for it (Fig. 2, p.67). The plant is poisonous to livestock, and of

concern in Australia. Possibilities for biocontrol are being investigated, complicated by the fact that in both Australia and New Zealand there are many native *Senecio* species. Landcare Research / Manaaki Whenua discusses the situation in Issue 68 of their *What's New in Biological Control of Weeds?* (May 2014). Meanwhile, it looks as though this is another upwardly mobile species, and one to watch.

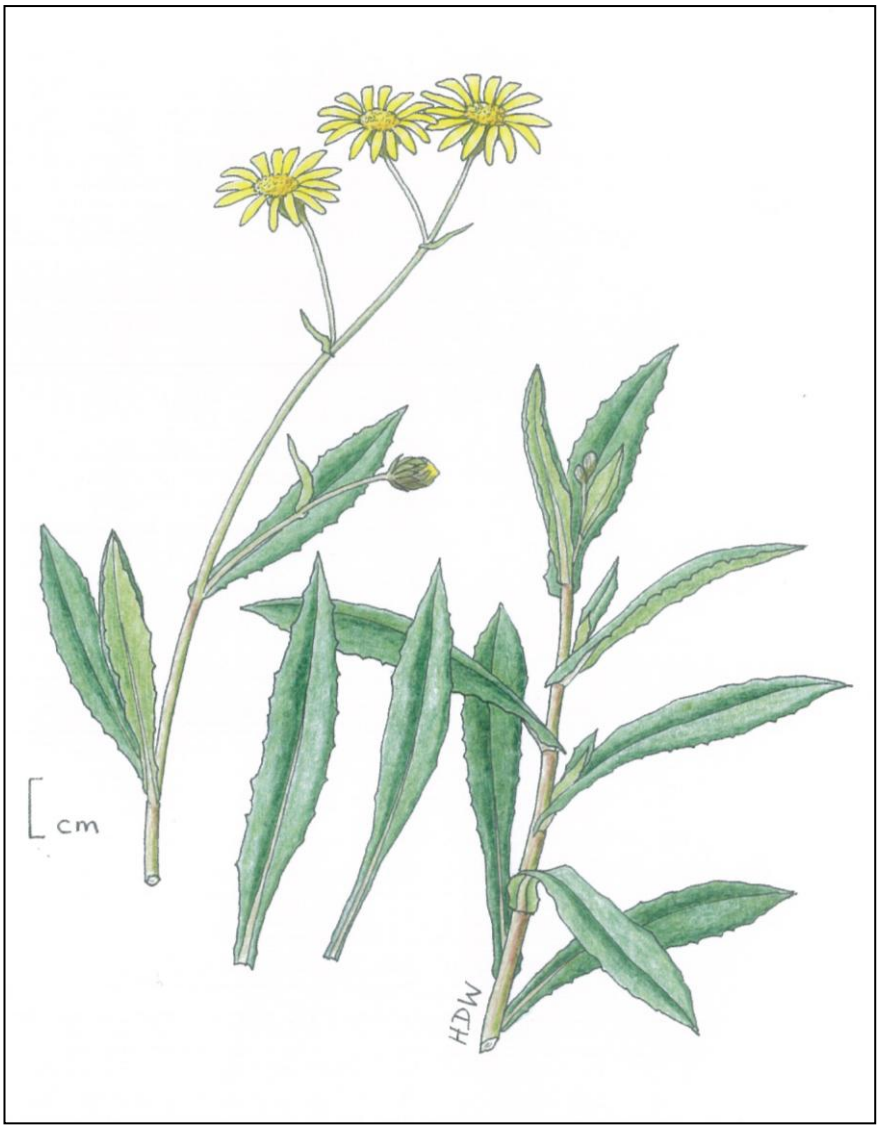

Figure 2 Another possibly "upwardly mobile species", *Senecio madagascariensis* (*S. skirrhodon*).

References

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ 1988. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 4. Naturalised Pteridophytes, Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ, Brownsey PJ 1995. Checklist of dicotyledons, gymnosperms and pteridophytes naturalised or casual in New Zealand: additional records 1988 – 1993. New Zealand Journal of Botany 33: 151 – 182.