

THALE CRESS – A BRIEF NOTE

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Thale cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*), also known as wall cress, is famous for having the smallest known genome in vascular plants and for being a model subject for genetic research (see cover of this issue). It is a member of the Brassicaceae, also known as Cruciferae. Thale cress is a bit like its well-known relative shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) but instead of having heart-shaped seed capsules (silicles), it has long slender ones (siliques). Thale cress is native to temperate Eurasia and North Africa.

Volume IV of the *Flora of New Zealand* (1988) records it as being locally common in waste places, gardens, and railway ballast in Auckland, Nelson, Canterbury and Otago. I didn't notice it on Banks Peninsula until October 1998 when I biked past numerous plants along the stony margins of the main road through Duvauchelle. It has increased steadily since then and is now widespread along roadsides in the Akaroa area. It achieved the Hinewai Species List in October 2015 when it appeared along the margins of Long Bay Road next to the reserve.

It is a fast-growing, short-lived little cress, completing the life cycle from germination to seed production in as little as a month. Some populations turn purplish-red in full sunshine, presumably due to anthocyanin pigments. As I write (November 2016), hundreds of spent plants are turning the roadside red along State Highway 75 between Takamātua and Akaroa.

Thale cress appears to be on the march in many other parts of New Zealand too, no doubt encouraged by the use of herbicide, which tends to knock out most competition.