

## Horned Poppies

Horned poppies (*Glaucium flavum*) are one of many pretty plants that have come into New Zealand and found a place where they can run amok, unimpeded by any of the threats they face at home. Even sheep and rabbits avoid them.

They are a poppy, with a yellow flower, hairy grey leaves, and a seedhead that looks like a curved cow horn – hence their common name. They love beaches and dry gravel banks, putting down a tap root that can be a metre or more long. In these places they outcompete native vegetation, especially grasses and herbs.

Each plant starts as a small rosette of soft grey leaves. By the end of their first year they are usually ready to flower and produce seeds – perhaps 500 seeds that year. If they were a verbascum or foxglove, they would then die. But horned poppies instead spend winter adding more rosettes. And the next year produce more seed. After a few years they are maybe 30 cm across and producing 10,000 seeds a year.

If conditions are good, they will have been joined by a lot of their friends and relations, and eventually their patch of beach will be completely covered in poppies. At Baring Head we have had sites transform from a few poppies to 50% of the ground covered in a couple of years. The numbers can be terrifying – you can dig out 1000 poppies and it hardly makes a dent.

But the good news is that the seed doesn't seem to last very long in the ground, they are easy to grub out, and it is easy to snap off the seedheads. At Baring Head we have almost eradicated them from large areas of the coast by stopping them producing seed and gradually grubbing them all out. If you get in before they proliferate, eradication is easy. And getting in early saves a lot of work. That said, clearing Baring Head has taken an enormous amount of work, and we probably have a few hundred thousand plants in one patch left to do. We are also gradually (with landowner permission) working our way along the next section of beach towards Pencarrow and have also helped Jo Greenman to get most of them off the beaches near Pencarrow, where they are just starting to invade.



If left unchecked, they will spread throughout our coastline reducing the suitability of the habitat for regionally threatened birds such as the banded dotterel and plants like the sea holly. Recent work by Greater Wellington has shown that coastal sites across the region are now dominated by non-native species, but this dominance is due to just a few species which, if contained, would give our native species much more of a chance.

So, if you see a horned poppy, admire it, and then pull it out. If it has a seedhead, break it off and put it in your rubbish bag, as they can continue to develop mature seeds even when broken off. By acting now, we can easily stop Eastbourne beaches from being taken over—every poppy you remove will avoid thousands more being there next year.

Paula Warren, Friends of Baring Head