

VEGETATION OF DUNES AND CLIFF TOPS OF ANGLESEA-AIREYS INLET REGION

... *Helen Lee with Drawings by Ruth Hurst*

The coastal vegetation of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet not only provides protection from erosion and sheltered habitat and food for local fauna, but it also has its own beauty that, when linked with the splendour of the coastline, captures visitors' attention.

The three plants that have been chosen for us this month, and described by Helen Lee, an ANGAIR member, a well-recognised botanist, and a long-term resident of Aireys Inlet, are three species that most readers will have observed along our beaches, dunes and cliff tops.

Rolling Spinifex *Spinifex sericeus* Family Poaceae

An attractive, sand-binding grass, often on the low dunes, Spinifex has a stout, creeping stem on the surface of the dune, or partially buried in the sand. The silvery-silky leaves (*sericeus* means silky), about 20–30 cm long, are prominent above the sand surface. The male flowers have long stamens with rich auburn anthers, but it is the

female flower that captures your attention. These flowers form complex inflorescences, in which the spikelets grow together in a

spherical head, 20 cm in diameter. When ripe, the heads become detached from the plant, and are blown about in the wind, thus spreading the seeds along the dunes.

American Sea Rocket *Cakile edentula* Family Brassicaceae

Sea Rocket, a plant from the east coast of North America, has become naturalised in Victoria, and is found along most of the beaches in the region. It is a pioneer plant growing just above the high tide mark, and is often moved from one area to another by the force of high incoming tides.

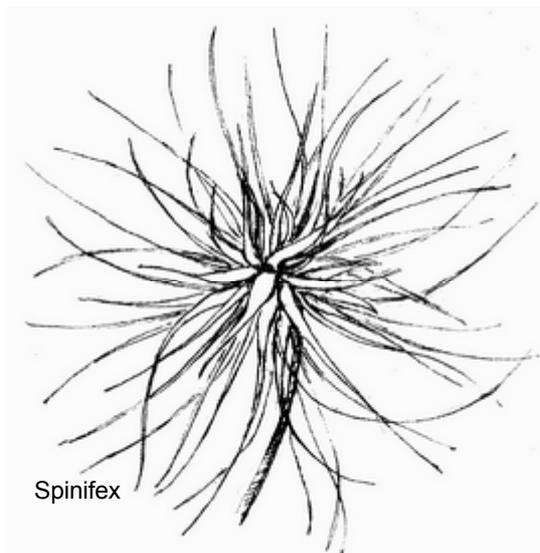
It is a semi-prostrate, succulent, spreading herb with succulent leaves that

are entire or deeply divided. The white to purple flowers, with 4 petals about 10 mm long, and 6 stamens, grow in clusters or racemes. The fruit is an interesting feature. It is in two segments, rocket-shaped and up to 25 mm long. The upper and lower segments are easily broken apart at maturity. The fruits are distributed by wave action. The seeds will not germinate in the sand until the salt content of the seed coat is reduced by rain.

Moonah *Melaleuca lanceolata* Family Myrtaceae

Flowering in summer, this attractive species can be found on the cliff tops, or just below the cliff edge, on the larger dunes by the mouth of the Painkalac Creek, and also on the dunes at Point Roadknight and Moggs Creek. In fact, it is a common coastal plant that varies in growth patterns depending upon its habitat. At the east end of Boundary Road, Aireys Inlet, and at Moggs Creek, it is found as a dense shrub, but along the cliff towards Sunnymead Beach, it has a straggly form. The leaves are lance-shaped (*lanceolata*), alternate, narrow and to 15 mm long and 3 mm wide.

The creamy-white, strongly scented flowers grow in leafy spikes. If you look closely at an individual flower, you will notice that it has a receptacle, cup-like, inferior ovary and that the stamens are in bundles of 8–14. The smooth globular fruit that follows on a leafy stem is about 4 mm in diameter.



Copyright

Any article or information appearing in this *Newsletter* may be copied to further interest in the conservation of native flora and fauna or in environmental care, provided that the source and contributor(s) are acknowledged.