



Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc

ABN 17 536 241 485

PO Box 244 Venus Bay Vic 3956

Website: www.friendsofvenusbaypeninsula.org.au

Email: friendsofvbp@gmail.com

Plant of the month: Seaberry Saltbush *Rhagodia candolleana*



Seaberry Saltbush *Rhagodia candolleana* is a dense, medium-sized scrambling shrub to around two metres in height and width, although it may reach greater heights when growing through other plants. The branchlets are distinctly ribbed and the leaves are semi-succulent to 35 mm long, glossy green above and paler below. The leaves are often widened towards the base into a spade shape and the leaf margins are frequently turned under or recurved. The plant is usually dioecious, meaning the similar male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Flowers are inconspicuous, whitish and occur in mealy pyramidal sprays from December to April, followed by small, glossy dark red berries, which are flattened and dimpled at the top.

Seaberry Saltbush is very common on Venus Bay's coastal sands. It is a tough, screening shrub that is able to tolerate a wide variety of conditions; it is pest-resistant and relatively fire-retardant due to the salt content in the leaves. Its berries are very attractive to many native birds as you can see by their red droppings. The leaves can be cooked and eaten and the berries are edible, although they may be bitter and vary in sweetness from plant to plant. The leaves and fruit were a food source for Aboriginal people. Propagation is from cuttings and pruning may be necessary to keep the plants contained.

As suggested by the name, Seaberry Saltbush belongs to the Chenopodiaceae or Saltbush family. The unusual shape of the leaves is typical of this family, which includes many species adapted to harsh, saline environments. Beetroot and spinach also belong to this family, as well as another common local plant Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma* and the roadside and cleared area weed Fat Hen *Chenopodium album*. *Rhagodia* comes from the Greek 'rhagos', a berry and *candolleana* comes from the de Candolle family of Swiss botanists.

Lorraine Norden (Dip. Hort.) For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.