

# *Salsola kali*

Russian thistle or tumbleweed



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## MARINE-COASTAL EXOTIC SPECIES GUIDE FOR ARGENTINA

### DESCRIPTION

- Annual plant, branched, with a globose general aspect. Branches with reddish-violet striae.
- Fleshy leaves with a rather firm and stinging spine at the end.
- Flowers, pink to fuchsia, small and abundant in the leaf axils.
- When mature and dry, the above-ground structure detaches from its root and tumbles away in the wind dispersing the seeds.



Photos: Alejandro Bortolus



1 m high

### HABITAT

Usually on sandy salty soils, but capable of inhabiting all kind of substrates along the coast including gravel beaches and dunes. In Argentina, it blooms from March to April.

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### SIMILAR SPECIES



*Atriplex* spp.

*Suaeda* spp.

- *Atriplex* spp.: Natives. Plants with flowers pink to pale fuchsia. Less tolerant to environmental perturbations than *S. kali*. Stems without colored striae. Soft green to gray leaves without spines.
- *Suaeda* spp.: Natives. Bushes with oblong-elongated fleshy leaves without spines. Stems without violet striae. Flowers and fruits green, pink or pale yellow, grouped along the distant part of the branches.

### INVASIVE STATUS

*Salsola kali* is native to Europe and Asia, but it currently shows a global distribution. Particularly invasive along side roads, crops and all sorts of modified soils. In Mendoza, La Pampa, Buenos Aires, Río Negro, Chubut and Santa Cruz provinces. In 2014 was declared “agricultural plague”.

### IMPACT ON NATIVE COMMUNITIES

Although its effect remains unknown, in a matter of weeks, this species can build up structures of over 1m<sup>3</sup> that overgrow any nearby vegetation. The tumbleweed structures, loaded with hundreds of thousands of seeds, make of this species one dangerous invasive species wherever it is introduced.



Above-ground structures of *S. kali*, tumbling away in the wind during winter.

### CONTACT US

This guide has been developed by the Grupo de Ecología en Ambientes Costeros (GEAC), from CENPAT (CONICET). If you find this species outside the reported areas, please contact us and let us know the date, locality, approximate number of individuals and, if possible, send us a picture:

 [especiesexoticasarg@gmail.com](mailto:especiesexoticasarg@gmail.com)

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