



The essential scavvy

A native shrub vital to the islands is *Scaevola sericia* or 'scavvy' as it often called. *Scaevola* is a very fast growing shrub that reaches 3 metres in height and in places forms almost impenetrable thickets 100m wide. It has glossy, oval, leathery leaves, 25cm long and a very distinctive one sided white flower which looks like half a flower. The small fruit is round, white, fleshy and it floats. This plant is vitally important as it literally holds some islands together; it can grow right beside the sea and its roots, which are often below sea level at high tide, bind the sand and stop the waves from eroding the beach. It also controls the run off of rain water.

Over 2,500mm of rain fall annually on Chagos and this water would wash away the shore unless *Scaevola* was there to prevent it. A classic example of this can be seen in Diego Garcia in front of the officers' quarters facing the lagoon. Here, contrary to advice, *Scaevola* was cleared and the buildings sited too close to the sea; as a result the sea eroded the sandy coast and a sea wall had to be built to prevent the waves undermining foundations of the buildings.

Scaevola sericia is often listed as *Scaevola taccada* and belongs to the Family Goodeniaceae. It is a pan tropical largely Indo-Pacific strand plant. It should not be confused with *Argusia (Tournefortia)*, another important native plant which grows in the same habitat. *Argusia* has grey-green velvety leaves and, like *Scaevola*, is important in controlling erosion of the sea shore.

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