

# Melicytus drucei

## COMMON NAME

Mount Egmont shrub māhoe, Druce's māhoe

## SYNONYMS

None (first described in 1996)

## FAMILY

Violaceae

## AUTHORITY

Melicytus drucei Molloy et B.D.Clarkson

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 48

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, RR

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, RR

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, RC, OL

2004 | Range Restricted

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Greyish widely branched tangled shrub with speckled twigs inhabiting one small area in Mt Egmont National Park. Leaves not immediately obvious, 7-12mm long by 2mm wide, dark green. Flowers small, bell-shaped, under branches. Fruit small, purple.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Mt Egmont National Park (Ahukawakawa Swamp and Pouakai Range)

## HABITAT

Known from two sites. At the Ahukawakawa Swamp it grows along the colluvial toeslope, alluvial fan, and alluvial terrace, in the canopy layer or scrub margins of mixed scrub/shrubland (grey scrub) in places exposed to full sunlight. On the Pouakai Range it grows near or above tree-line on flat or gentle slopes with waterlogged peat soils or on steep sided, scrubby ridge lines.



Ahukawakawa, Mt Taranaki. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Ahukawakawa, Taranaki. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Erect, ± evergreen shrubs 2 m or more tall. Exposed plants with compact, rigid, grey-brown crowns up to 1 m diameter, composed of tightly filiramate-divaricate branches. Shaded plants with smaller, less filiramate-divaricate, segmented crowns intermixed with those of other shrubs. Stems erect or suberect, 20-40 mm diameter, knobbly and crooked with regular coppice and epicormic shoots and occasional layered stems. Branchlets initially slender, later stout, curved or straight, green densely lenticellate, tapering to spinous tips; strongly interlaced on exposed plants with branch angles of 70-90°, less interlaced on shaded plants. Adult leaves alternate, 7-12 × 2 mm, solitary or in fascicles of 2-3, shortly petiolate or ± sessile, linear-oblong, often ± parallel-sided, entire or irregularly lobed, distinctly reflexed, thin, dark green above, paler beneath, glabrous when mature, minutely pubescent when young, margins finely revolute, apex retuse, often with a minute central apiculus. Flowers hermaphrodite, nectariferous, scented, solitary or more rarely paired, axillary, pendulous on lower side of branches. Peduncles slender, 0.5-2.0 mm long, decurved, green, with 2 minute, unequal, opposite, ovate, erose, orange bracteoles near the base, sometimes also at the middle. Flowers 2.5-3.5 mm diameter sepals unequal, ovate to deltoid, 1.0-1.5 mm long, green suffused with red, with paler, membranous, erosulate-ciliate margins; petals ± fleshy, broadly oblong to cuneate, 3-4 × 2 mm, cream or yellow, with reflexed slightly thickened tips and erosulate-ciliate margins; anthers sessile, oblong, 0.5 mm long, 2-loculed, creamy yellow, with an extended, toothed, membranous, orange connective. Erect nectary appendage attached basally to the dorsal surface of each stamen, 0.5 mm long, cuneate, green. Anthers fused to form an urceolate tube surrounding the gynoecium. Ovary 1 mm long, ovoid, green; style slender, 0.5 mm long, not reaching corolla rim, 2-fid, green; stigma lobes flared, erosulate-papillate. Fruit a globose berry 4-5 mm diameter, white with scattered purple to black spots or patches. Pyrenes (1-)2, 3-4 mm long, plano-convex, purplish-brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Melicytus flexuosus* Molloy et A.Druce from which it differs by its shorter stature, compact rigid crown of tightly divaricating branches and mostly leafy branchlets, hermaphrodite flowers, chromosome number (2n = 48) and geographic isolation.

## FLOWERING

October to December

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Red/Pink

## FRUITING

March to May

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Slow from seed and cuttings. A very slow growing plant which has an attractive growth habit. It is rarely seen in cultivation.

## THREATS

*Melicytus drucei* is a naturally uncommon, range restricted endemic. However it is browsed avidly by introduced animals such as possums and hares. When these animals are controlled *M. drucei* plants thrive and set abundant seed. Seedlings and saplings have become common since possum numbers have been greatly reduced within the National Park following the use of 1080 by the New Zealand Department of Conservation in the late 1990's.

## ETYMOLOGY

**melicytus:** From the Greek meli (honey) and kytos (hollow container), referring to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. Literally "honey-cave"

**drucei:** Named after Anthony (Tony) Peter Druce, one of New Zealand's most respected field botanist (1920-1999).

## NEW ZEALAND BOTANICAL HISTORY

For a brief biography for this plant is named, see this article in [Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#).

Hundreds of Tony's famed plant lists can be found [here](#) and back-issues of regional Botanical Society Journals which he contributed can be accessed [here](#).

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 2 July 2006. Description adapted from Molloy & Clarkson (1996).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Molloy, B.P.J.; Clarkson, B.D. 1996: A new, rare species of *Melicytus* (Violaceae) from New Zealand New Zealand Journal of Botany 34: 431-440.

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Melicytus drucei* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-drucei/> (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-drucei/>