Alectryon excelsus subsp. excelsus

COMMON NAMES
New Zealand ash, tītoki

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Small tree with spreading branches and a dark fluted trunk. Leaves with 3-7 offset pairs of glossy dark green leaflets. Flowers red, in small, clustered, sprays. Fruit fleshy red partly surrounding a black seed and expanding from a furry brown capsule.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tree between 10m and 20m tall. Branches stout, erect, all parts invested with fine, velutinous, ferrugineous hairs. Bark brown. Adult leaves dark green, matt when mature, imparipinnate, alternate 80-260 mm long. Leaflets 3-7 pairs; lamina 45-105 x 19-40 mm, subcoriaceous, lanceolate, oblong or narrowly-ovate, apex, subacute often acuminate, rarely obtuse; base cuneate, truncate to oblique, upper leaf surface matt; lamina margin entire or deeply serrated 1-4 times near apex. Inflorescences axillary 90-120 mm long, sparingly branched panicles. Flowers bisexual or staminate. Petals absent. Stamens 5-8 in bisexual and 6-10 in staminate flowers, crimson. Stigma ovoid, in staminate flowers ovary tholiform, style absent, in perfect flowers broadly urceolate, style 1.5-2 mm, erect. Fruits sessile, 1-2-lobed, 14-20 x 9-14 mm, pubescent, globular, carina 3-5 mm long on one side. Seed 7-10 x 4-8 mm, subglobose, black, lustrous, sarcotesta fleshy, scarlet, papillose.

SIMILAR TAXA
Alectryon excelsus subsp. grandis (Cheeseman) de Lange et E.K.Cameron which is a smaller shrub or tree, usually with a multi-trunked habit. The leaves of subsp. grandis are very glossy (vernicose), distinctly bullate, with 2-4 pairs of broadly oblong or ovate leaflets. A. excelsus subsp. grandis is an allopatric Three Kings Islands endemic.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Islands from Te Paki to Banks Peninsula

Alectryon excelsus subsp excelsus. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Seedling. Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 09/10/2016, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT
A widespread coastal to lowland forest tree. Often favouring well drained, fertile, alluvial soils along river banks and associated terraces. It is also a major component of coastal forests, particularly those developed within exposed situations or on basaltic or andesite volcanics. It is a common offshore island tree within the Hauraki Gulf. The large fruits are bird dispersed and so titoki trees often occur as a sparse components of most lowland forest types, throughout the North Island.

GENUS
Alectryon

FAMILY
Sapindaceae

AUTHORITY
Alectryon excelsus Gaertn. subsp. excelsus

SYNONYMS
Alectryon excelsus Gaert., Alectryon excelsus Gaertn. var. excelsus

TAXONOMIC NOTES
The exact status of Alectryon plants on the Poor Knights Islands needs further investigation. In some respects these plants appear intermediate between A. excelsus subsp. excelsus and subsp. grandis (de Lange et al. 1999).

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October - December (-June)

FRUITING
November - August

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Arillate seeds are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed. Grows quickly in suitable conditions, preferring well drained, fertile soils in full sun or partial shade. A popular street tree, and as the fruit is bird dispersed it often naturalises in gardens from street side plantings

POISONOUS PLANT
The round black seeds are best avoided despite limited information on their toxicity. many plants in the same family are poisonous. Click on this link for more information about Poisonous native plants.

ETYMOLOGY
alectryon: In Greek mythology Alectryon was punished and turned into a rooster by Ares after failing to keep watch, possible refers to a cockscomb
excelsus: Tall

NVS CODE
ALEESE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 32

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cameron, E.K. 1998. Frost resistance in titoki *Alectryon. Auckland Botanical Society Journal 53*: 15.
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Duguid, F. 1961. Flowering in titoki. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin 32*: 16
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ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (1 August 2005). Description by P.J. de Lange based in part on de Lange et al. (1999).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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