Clematis cunninghamii

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Scrambling liane with pale green flowers, smooth-edged or with 1-2 sharp-tipped lobes leaves which are covered in brownish down when young

FLOWER COLOURS
White

Wellsford. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 10/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Evergreen woody climber with main stems to 3 m or more tall; branchlets finely grooved, pilose when young. Leaves 3-foliate, opposite; petioles c. 3 cm long, pilose-pubescent. Leaflets pubescent-pilose with fulvous hairs especially beneath; on petiolules c. 1 cm long; midvein and secondary veins visible above, more obvious below; leaflet lamina 1.5-4 x 1-2 cm, ovate, entire or crenately toothed or lobed, submembranous, dark green to yellowish-green, tip acute, base usually cordate, undersides paler. Juvenile leaves larger, thinner, irregularly lobed and sometimes serrate. Inflorescences unisexual, conspicuous, in axillary dichasial cymes, few-flowered, up to 8 cm long, inflorescence bracts linear-oblong, paired, united, inserted above middle of peduncle, fulvous. Flowers slightly fragrant. Male 1-2(-2.5) cm diam., sepals 5-8, narrow-oblong to elliptic-oblong, subacute, imbricate, glabrous above, hairy beneath, 9-12(-22) x 2-5 mm, yellowish; stamens many, anthers 0.7-1 mm long, filaments glabrous., up to 1 cm long. Female 5-8 sepals, imbricate, yellowish, glabrous above, hairy beneath, elliptic-ovate, 8-13(-15) x 2-3(-6) mm; staminodes few. Achenes hairy, elliptic, narroweed to apex, compressed, margin thickened and distinct, surface finely ridged, 2.6-3.4(-3.6) mm long, styles 20-26(-30) cm long at fruiting, white-plumose for most of length, short hairs at base.

Wellsford. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 10/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Similar to other climbing yellow-or green-flowered clematis species that have large leaves. It can be distinguished most easily from C. foetida by the strong pleasant smell of that species (and also by the hairy rather than downy sepals and petals). C. forsteri has young leaves that are either glabrous underneath, or occ. with white (rather than brownish) hairs (the anthers are also larger in this species).

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island. South to Hawke's Bay in the east, to ?? in the west.

HABITAT
Lowland forest and forest margins

GENUS
Clematis

FAMILY
Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY
Clematis cunninghamii Turcz.

SYNONYMS
Clematis parviflora A.Cunn, Clematis hillii Colenso

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September-November

FRUITING
November-January

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Pappate achenes are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY
clematis: From the Greek klema ‘vine’, alluding to the vine-like habit of many species
cunninghamii: Named after Allan Cunningham (1791–1839) who was an English botanist and explorer, primarily known for his travels to Australia (New South Wales) and New Zealand to collect plants. Author of Florae Insularum Novae Zelandiae Precursor, 1837–40 (Introduction to the flora of New Zealand).

NVS CODE
CLECUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 16

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 At Risk – Regionally Declining | 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

Allan, H.H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Government Printer, Wellington
Eagle, A. 2000. Eagle's complete trees and shrubs of NZ. Te Papa Press, Wellington
Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309
Webb, C.J. & Simpson, M.J.A. 2001. Seeds of NZ gymnosperms and dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch.
Webb, C.J; Sykes, W.R; Garnock-Jones, P.J. 1988. Flora of NZ, Vol. IV. DSIR, Christchurch

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Allan (1961), Webb et al (1988), Eagle (2000) and Webb and Simpson (2001).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/clematis-cunninghamii/

PDF DATE

08 June 2026