Coprosma chathamica

COMMON NAMES
Chatham Island karamū, karamū

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Canopy tree with pairs of oval leaves inhabiting scattered sites on the Chatham Islands. Twigs and leaf bases bearing small hairs. Leaves with pale veins which have a small pit at some of their junctions, those of juvenile plants to 12cm long, those of adults only 3-4cm long. Ripe fruit yellow.



Taiko camp, Chatham Is. January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green



Taiko camp, Chatham Is. January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tree up to 15 m tall; trunk up to c.600 mm diameter; branches and branchlets rather stout, densely pubescent when young. Leaves on short 8-10 mm long fleshy-coriaceous petioles. Stipules triangular, pubescent, densely ciliate; apical denticle prominent black, surrounded on either side by 2-4 smaller denticles. Lamina of juvenile leaves subcoriaceous, 45-75 × 20-45 mm, dark green to green, broadly ovate to ovate-oblong, obtuse, mucronulate, base cuneately narrowed, margins often hairy; adult lamina 20-35 × 15-30 mm, dark green and rather glossy above, paler below, ovate to ovate-oblong, elliptic to oblong-elliptic, obtuse, mucronulate, base cuneately narrowed, margins slightly recurved, entire to distinctly undulose. Reticulated veins not or scarce evident above, evident below. Male flowers solitary or in clusters of up to 6 on shortly branched axillary peduncles; calyx 0 or vestigial; corolla funnelform, lobes 5, acuminate, > tube. Female flowers 1-6 together; calyx-teeth short, ciliolate; corolla tubular, lobes ovate, acute, > tube. Drupe yellow-red to orange, obovoid, slightly compressed to subdidymous, c.9-12 × 9-14 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
A very distinctive species which on the Chatham Islands is not likely to be confused with any of the other Coprosma species present. The tree growth habit marks it well in the field, while the very large juvenile leaves with their usually distinctly hairy margins and smaller glossy, dark green adult leaves which usually have distinctly undulose margins readily distinguish it. Allan (1961) followed W.R.B. Oliver and placed it as close to C. petiolata (Kermadec islands) and C. repens in Sectionion Petiolatae. Morphologically it has little to do with these two species, sharing more features in common (especially the growth habit, adult leag shape, fruits and pyrene morphology) with the arborescent Norfolk Island endemic C. pilosa. However, molecular data clearly shows that C. chathamica is closely allied to C. repens.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Chatham Islands group: Rekohu (Chatham Island), Rangiauria (Pitt Island) and Rangatira (South-east Island)

HABITAT
Coastal and inland forest. Mostly on peat and usually in sites that are at least temporarily waterlogged but also on limestone, schist and basalt outcrops in free draining situations. An important canopy tree which co-associates with matipo (Myrsine chathamica) on free draining soils, and swamp akeake (Olearia telmatica) in the waterlogged soils in the lowlands to form one of the main forest types. It is also prominent with tarahinau (Dracophyllum arboreum) in the southern tablelands forests, and less frequently with akeake (Olearia traversiorum) in dune forest and overlying basalt or schist.

THREATS
An Island endemic that is not really threatened. One of the major forest trees on the Chatham Islands.

GENUS
Coprosma

FAMILY
Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY
Coprosma chathamica Cockayne

SYNONYMS
None (first described in 1902)

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August - December

FRUITING
November - May

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and semi-hardwood cuttings. An attractive species that given time will grow in to a large tree so it needs plenty of space. Does best planted in a permanently moist soil (it can tolerate periodic water logging).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
coprosma: From the Greek kopros ‘dung’ and osme ‘smell’, referring to the foul smell of the species, literally ‘dung smell’
chathamica: From the Chatham Islands

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to Coprosma species of New Zealand

NVS CODE
COPCHA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 132

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Allan, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I, Government Printer, 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

ATTRIBUTION
Description based on Allan (1961) and supplemented with additional measurements and observations taken from herbarium specimens and wild plants.
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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
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MORE INFORMATION
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