

Coprosma chathamica

COMMON NAME

Chatham Island karamū, karamū

SYNONYMS

None (first described in 1902)

FAMILY

Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coprosma chathamica Cockayne

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

COPCHA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 132

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE

2004 | Range Restricted

BRIEF 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.

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.



Taiko camp, Chatham Is. January.

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Taiko camp, Chatham Is. January.

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WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

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, ciliate; corolla tubular, lobes ovate, acute, > tube. Drupe yellow-red to orange, obovoid, slightly compressed to subdidymous, c.9-12 × 9-14 mm.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to Coprosma species of New Zealand](#)

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 Section *Petiolatae*. Morphologically it has little to do with these two species, sharing more features in common (especially the growth habit, adult leaf 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*.

FLOWERING

August - December

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

FRUITING

November - May

LIFE CYCLE

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).

THREATS

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

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

ATTRIBUTION

Description based on Allan (1961) and supplemented with additional measurements and observations taken from herbarium specimens and wild plants.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coprosma-chathamica/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coprosma-chathamica/>