

# Coprosma distantia

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: OL, RF

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Rare bushy low-growing sprawling small-leaved wide-angled shrub inhabiting the northern tip of the North Island. Juvenile leaves mottled brown, adult leaves in sunny parts of plant to 12mm long, those in shaded parts to 20mm long, oval, glossy, margins curved, underside pale, tip with a small sharp point. Fruit yellowish.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Prostrate densely matted divaricating shrubs, 0.1-0.2 x 2-5 m, branches long-trailing. Bark of mature twigs dark silver-grey to almost black, corky, inner bark dark green. Adult leaves of two types. Those in exposed conditions broadly elliptic to oblanceolate, 3.5-12 x 1.5-2.5(-3.5) mm, dark green to almost orange-green, those in the shade up to 20 x 4.5 mm. Both types broadly elliptic to oblanceolate. Male and female plants on separate plants. Drupes (fruits) uniformly cream to pale lemon when fresh. Pyrenes (Seeds) 3.1-4.1(-4.4) x 2.0-2.5 mm, oblong-elliptic or elliptic, pale orange-yellow to light orange-yellow. For a full description see de Lange & Gardner (2002, *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 40(1): 25-38) where this species is treated as *C. obconica* subsp. *distantia*.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Coprosma obconica* differs by its suberect to erect shrub habit, greenish-white or translucent white, fruits variously striped or blotched dark violet-purple, much smaller, clogg-shaped, prominently “notched” pyrenes (seeds). *C. obconica* rarely grows on ultramafic rock (only two instances, involving two plants known). Both species are vegetatively distinguished from New Zealand *Coprosma* species by their leaf tips, which possess a nipple-like “bull nose” apical leaf prolongation.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Known only from the 120 ha exposure of serpentinite rock, at the Surville Cliffs, North Cape Scientific Reserve.

## HABITAT

Restricted to ultramafic (serpentinite) rock, where it grows on cliff faces, boulderfields, talus slopes, and on the dark red clay soils which develop on this rock type. It does not like competition from taller shrubs and grasses, so mainly grows in exposed habitats.

## THREATS

No serious active threats are present. The species is very common on the ultramafic (serpentinite) rock. However although viable seed is frequently seen, seedlings remain as yet unknown. All of the Surville Cliffs ultramafic flora is placed at some level of risk due to the slow spread of pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), needle bush (*Hakea sericea*), and downy hakea (*Hakea gibbosa*), fire, and from browsing animals.



Hikurua / de Surville Cliffs. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 26/02/2011, Licence: CC BY.



Stipule. In cultivation ex Hikurua / de Surville Cliffs. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 20/07/2007, Licence: CC BY.

## GENUS

Coprosma

## FAMILY

Rubiaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Coprosma distantia* (de Lange et R.O.Gardner) de Lange

## SYNONYMS

*Coprosma obconica* subsp. *distantia* de Lange et R.O.Gardner. Also known by the tag names *C. sp.*(s) in Eagle (1982)

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

April to October

## FRUITING

January to November

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Fleshy drupes are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Moderately easy from semi-hardwood or hardwood cuttings. Seed should germinate easily. Plants are very slow-growing (even slower than *C. obconica* s.s.).

## CULTIVATION

*Coprosma distantia* is grown by a few specialist nurseries, and several botanic gardens. Plants are very slow growing. All cultivated material seems to be from a female clone bought into cultivation by the late A.P. (Tony) Druce from material he collected in 1979 the Surville Cliffs. This clone, unlike *C. obconica* s.s., freely forms sterile fruits, and occasionally hybrid fruit where it is grown in the vicinity of other *Coprosma* species.

## ETYMOLOGY

**coprosma:** From the Greek kopros 'dung' and osme 'smell', referring to the foul smell of the species, literally 'dung smell'

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

## NVS CODE

COPDST

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 44

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: OL, RF

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: OL

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

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange, P.J.; Gardner, R.O. 2002: A taxonomic reappraisal of *Coprosma obconica* Kirk (Rubiaceae: Anthospermeae). *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 40(1): 25-38.

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 de Lange and Gardner (2002)

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026