Didymocheton spectabilis

COMMON NAMES
kohekohe, New Zealand mahogany

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Canopy tree bearing leaves with 4 pairs of large dark green glossy leaflets along a stem with fifth leaflet at the tip and a swollen base where leaf stem joins the twig. Inhabiting warmer forests. Flowers small, in sprays projecting from trunk and branches. Fruit orange, covered by a husk.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tree up to 15 m tall usually with abroad, spreading canopy. Trunk up to 1 m diam., branches stout, erect then spreading. Bark pale brown, under bark green. Leaves compound, imparipinnate, alternate on pulvinate petioles up to 40 mm long, leaflet pairs 4-6, (50-)-150(-200) x (20-)30(-80) mm, opposite to subopposite, bright green, yellow-green to dark green, ovate to obovate-oblong, leathery, margins somewhat undulate. Plants gynodioecious, with fixed female and inconstant males on different trees. Inflorescence a cymose, drooping, panicle arising from trunk and branches (cauliflorous). Flowers c. 30 mm diam., fleshy. Pedicels short. Calyx divided to base, lobes broad-oblong, abruptly pointed, ciliate, petals linear, 10 mm, spreading, waxy white or greenish. Capsules, woody, broad-obovoid to subglobose, 3-4-celled, c. 25 mm long, green. Seeds 2 per cell, orange or scarlet.

Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve, Porirua. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 04/07/2010, Licence: CC BY.

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SIMILAR TAXA
A very distinctive tree which with its large compound green leaves and cauliflorous flowering habit could not easily be confused with any other indigenous, naturalised or exotic species present in New Zealand.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Islands. In the South Island not extending much beyond the Marlborough Sounds, reaching a southern limit near the Hurunui River (Napenape).

HABITAT
Common and sometimes dominant or co-dominant tree of coastal to lowland forest.

THREATS
Not Threatened. However, where possum and rat numbers are high this species is not actively regenerating. Possums defoliolate trees, and will heavily browse inflorescences such that few succeed in flowering and setting fruit. Rats are major seed predators. Only where control of these animals is undertaken, or on possum and rodent-free offshore islands can one see kohekohe flowering, fruiting and regenerating freely. If numbers of these introduced animals remain unchecked, it is clear that kohekohe will decline and vanish from large parts of its natural range.

GENUS
Didymocheton

FAMILY
Meliaceae

AUTHORITY
Didymocheton spectabilis (G.Forst.) Mabb. et Holzmeyer

SYNONYMS
Trichilla spectabilis G.Forst., Hartighsea spectabilis Juss., Dysoxylum spectabile (G.Forst.) Hook.f.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
We follow Holzmeyer et al. (2021) in placing *Dysoxylum spectabile* in the genus *Didymocheton* Blume.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
March - June

FRUITING
April - August

TOLERANCES
Easily grown in a variety of situations and moisture levels. Intolerant of cold, and frost-sensitive.

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed.

EXTRA INFORMATION
The name of Pukekohe, a town south of Auckland, is an abbreviation of “Puke kohekohe” which means “Hill of the kohekohe”.

ETYMOLOGY
spectabilis: Notable

NVS CODE
DIDSPE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 84

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

Duguid, F. 1985. Kohekohe *Dysoxylum spectabile* as an accidental epiphyte. Wellington Botanical Society Bulleton, 42: 11
Holzmeyer, L.; Hauenschild, F.; Mabberley, D.J.; Muellner-Riehl, A.N. 2021: Confirmed polyphyly, generic recircumscription and typification of *Dysoxylum* (Meliaceae), with revised disposition of currently accepted species. *Taxon*. DOI https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.12591
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

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

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MORE INFORMATION

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