Euphrasia petriei

COMMON NAMES
eyebright

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
White



Temple Basin, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Hector Mountains. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tufted perennial herb sometimes arising from woody stock; stems woody at base, much-branched, prostrate or decumbent, rooting at nodes, branches erect, 20-80 (-120) mm tall, bifariously or occasionally uniformly pubescent. Leaves sessile, crowded or occasionally distant, 5-10 (-15) x 3-6 (-8) mm, obovate-cuneate to broadly obovate or suborbicular, unequally 3-lobed at tip with obtuse to subacute terminal lobe, or more evenly and acutely 3-5 (-7) toothed, surfaces glabrous, margins thickened, sometimes ciliate with glandular or non-glandular hairs. Flowers few clustered at tips of branches on short hidden pedicels, or in more elongated raceme with obvious pedicels sometimes equal to leaves. Calyx 5-9 mm long, usually glandular-hairy and white-pubescent, sometimes almost glabrous, evenly or subevenly divided ¼-⅓ way. Corolla white, 8-12-20 mm long and diameter; tube longer than calyx; lobes of lower lip up to 8 mm wide and emarginate or not greater than 4 mm wide and entire. Anthers red-brown, margins hairy, awns usually slightly unequal. Capsule less than or equal to calyx, 4-8 x 3.5-5 mm, more or less oval, glabrous; seeds numerous.

SIMILAR TAXA
The rather variable range of forms are similar in habit to Euphrasia revoluta or Euphrasia laingii but differ distinctly from both in the shape of the leaves and the glandular pubescence of the calyx. In this latter character and in habit they resemble Euphrasia townsonii but differ from that species in leaf-shape and short pedicels. See ‘Taxonomic Notes’ below for further information.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. South Island, mountains of main divide from Arthur’s Pass to western Otago and Fiordland.

HABITAT
Subalpine open and rocky places.

GENUS
Euphrasia

FAMILY
Orobanchaceae

AUTHORITY
Euphrasia petriei Ashwin

SYNONYMS
Formally grouped in Euphrasia revoluta Hook. f.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Flower-size varies greatly and can be used to divide the species into 2 more or less geographically separated forms:
In Canterbury and north-west Otago corollas are usually exceptionally large, (10-) 15-20 mm long and diameter, with lobes of lower lip 4-8 mm wide, bluntly expanded at tip and emarginate. Leaves are sometimes densely ciliate, and the plants may be up to 120 mm tall. This form (which includes the type) often occurs in company with E. revoluta *sensu stricto* and many mixed collections have been made. Even if the distinctive glandular pubescence is absent E. petriei is usually easily separated by its very differently shaped leaves, larger flowers, and stouter habit. However, occasionally specimens combine characters of both species and hybridism may be a factor contributing to the variability of E petriei in this part of its range.
In Fiordland and western Otago south of approximate latitude 44° corollas are much smaller, approximately 8-12 mm long and diameter, with lobes of lower lip only 2-4 mm wide and entire. Leaves are always glabrous and the plants rarely greater than 50 mm tall, though an anomalous collection from Clinton Saddle referred by Petrie to Euphrasia australis consists of luxuriant plants up to 100 mm tall with distant leaves and long pedicels. Dwarf densely tufted forms which have been collected on the Hector Mountains and Mount Pisa appear very distinct but are probably only epharmonic modifications. This form could receive varietal recognition, but as there is a possibility that Hooker's Euphrasia antarctica var. major and/or var. grandiflora belong here no new epithet is given.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November – February.

FRUITING
December – March.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seeds is dispersed by wind and possibly water and ballistic projection (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY
euphrasia: Eye-medicine
petriei: Named after Donald Petrie (1846 -1925), Scottish born Otago botanist

NVS CODE
EUPPET

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, NStr, RR, Sp
Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan, H. H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 1. Wellington: Government Printer. Page 855.
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 for NZPCN by M.D. Ward (9 November 2020) Description adapted from Allan (1961). Some of this factsheet information is derived from Flora of New Zealand Online and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/euphrasia-petriei/

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