

Knightia excelsa

COMMON NAME

rewarewa, NZ honeysuckle

SYNONYMS

None

FAMILY

Proteaceae

AUTHORITY

Knightia excelsa R.Br.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

KNIEXC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Tall cylindrical tree bearing masses of dark green jagged leathery leaves and dense spikes of reddish flowers common in regenerating forest of the North Island and Marlborough Sounds. Leaves 10-15cm long by 2-4cm wide, juvenile leaves to 30cm long. New growth covered in reddish fuzz.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic monotypic genus. North and South Islands. Common in the North Island, but confined to the Marlborough Sounds in the South Island.

HABITAT

A common tree of coastal, lowland and lower montane shrubland, secondary regrowth, and on occasion mature forest. Frost-tender when young so generally scarce from cooler, frost-prone habitats - nevertheless it can be very common in suitable sites on the Central Volcanic Plateau of the North Island.



Rewarewa. Photographer: Wayne Bennett



Rewarewa. Photographer: Wayne Bennett

FEATURES

Tall tree with columnar (fastigate) growth-form up to 30 m tall. Trunk up to 1 m diam. Bark dark brown. Branches erect, fastigate, at first angled, clad in red-brown (rust-coloured), velutinous, tomentum. Juvenile leaves yellow-green, 150-300(-400) x 10-15 mm, narrowly linear-lanceolate, sometimes forked 2,3 or 4 times, margins acutely serrated. Adult leaves dark green, 100-150(-200) x 25-40 mm, broad lanceolate to narrow-oblong or oblong, sometimes obovate, occasionally forked, rigid, bluntly and coarsely serrated, covered in deciduous velutinous red-brown pubescence. Inflorescence a stout raceme up to 100(-180) mm x 60 mm, densely flowered. Pedicels and perianth clad in red-brown, velutinous tomentum. Flowers sexually perfect. Perianth 4, exterior covered in red-brown tomentum, interior dark crimson, segments at first cylindric and fused, soon separating and curling spirally. Stamens 4, filaments crimson, short, anthers long, linear, rich golden-yellow. Ovar sessile. Style long, crimson, long persistent. Fruits, follicles 30-40 mm long, 2-valved, woody, pubescent; valves tapering to persistent style. Seeds 10 mm, apex terminated by 15 mm long wing.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinct tree with no close relatives or "look alikes" within the indigenous, naturalised, or exotic cultivated flora of New Zealand. Easily recognised by the dark red, "bottle brush" like inflorescences, and by the leathery, broad lanceolate, dark green, serrated leaves. All emergent foliage, inflorescences and immature seed pods are covered in a distinctive velutinous, red-brown (rust-coloured) tomentum.

FLOWERING

(September-) October-December

FLOWER COLOURS

Brown, Red/Pink

FRUITING

October-January (fruit takes a year to mature, so fruit and flowers may co-occur)

LIFE CYCLE

Winged seeds are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed, Cuttings are very difficult to strike. Young plants are very quick growing but cold-sensitive.

ETYMOLOGY

knightia: Knight

excelsa: Tall

WHERE TO BUY

Not commonly cultivated and inclined to be badly damaged by thrips in some parts of the warmer parts of the country. Offered by some commercial and specialist native plant nurseries. This species should be more widely cultivated, it is very attractive, and the flowers are popular with nectar-feeding birds.

ATTRIBUTION

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/knightia-excelsa/>