Korthalsella salicornioides

COMMON NAMES
dwarf mistletoe

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPT
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Dense mass of green to reddish-yellow beaded succulent stems to 10cm long growing on twigs of another plant (mainly mānuka and kānuka). Leaves (stems) 3–10mm long by 1–3mm wide, round. Flowers tiny, fruit small, yellowish.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Hemiparasitic, succulent, much branched, green, yellow-green, red-green to orange-green plant parasitising exposed branches and branchlets of host. Haustoria internal, dark green, encircling stele of host. Plants 30–100 × 10–450 mm, erupting from host bark, individual aerial structures lasting from 1–4 years before dehiscing and resprouting. **Branches** arising at narrow angles. **Internodes** terete, succulent to subsucculent, 3–10 × 1–3 mm, narrowed to a finely constricted node. **Collar** truncate, up to 0.5 mm long, sheathing at nodes. **Flowers** scarcely differentiated from barren stems, 3–10 × 1 mm. **Fruit** 1.5 mm long, ovoid to globular, dispersed by birds or ejected under hydraulic pressure.

SIMILAR TAXA
None. The two other species of *Korthasella* Tiegh. endemic to New Zealand have flattened internodes are fewer branches arising at wider angles.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from Te Paki south), South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura. Easily overlooked.

HABITAT
Coastal to upper montane and subalpine (0–1300 m a.s.l.). A parasite found in forest and shrublands. Most commonly found parasitic on *Leptospermum scoparium* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst. (kahikatoa/mānuka) and species of *Kunzea* (rawiri/titiri/kānuka).



Hikurua / de Surville Cliffs, Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/02/2011, Licence: CC BY.



Gall mite (Aceria korelli) infestation. Lake Wairarapa. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 16/10/2011, Licence: CC BY.

THREATS
An apparently naturally uncommon and biologically sparse species which can on occasion be locally abundant, but is more usually known from large parts of its likely range by only spot or scattered occurrences. In some parts of its range it is under threat due to the felling of its main host species (*Leptospermum* and *Kunzea*) for firewood and also to clear land for farming or pine plantations.
When myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) was detected in New Zealand (May 2017) the conservation status of *Korthalsella salicornioides* was upgraded as a precautionary measure to 'Threatened – Nationally Critical' because, on best advice, it was believed that no indigenous Myrtaceae had resistance to the myrtle rust disease (de Lange et al. 2018). *Korthalsella salicornioides* is almost exclusively parasitic on species of *Leptospermum* and *Kunzea*, both genera in the Myrtaceae family. Currently there have been no reports of infected wild trees of *Kunzea* but inoculation trials of the New Zealand species has demonstrated they are susceptible and that, over time, infected specimens will die. Only time will tell if wild populations of *Kunzea and* Leptospermum will be threatened by this rust fungus.
Myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) is an invasive fungus that threatens native myrtle species. Learn more myrtlerust.org.nz.

GENUS
Korthalsella

FAMILY
Viscaceae

AUTHORITY
Korthalsella salicornioides (A.Cunn.) Tiegh.

SYNONYMS
Viscum salicornioides A.Cunn.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–March

FRUITING
October–May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Fleshy berries are dispersed by ballistic projection, attachment and possibly frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult—should not be removed from the wild.

HOST NOTES
The most host-specific of the three New Zealand species of the genus, the favoured host is *Leptospermum scoparium* followed by *Kunzea* species. However *Sophora chathamica* Cockayne, *Myrsine australis* (A.Rich.) Allan, *Dracophyllum acerosum* Bergg., *Melicope simplex* A.Cunn. and *Gaultheria antipoda* G.Forst. are sometimes also parasitised.

PLANT OF THE MONTH
This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for August 2020 for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

korthalsella: After Korthals, botanist
salicornioides: Like Salicornia (glasswort)

NVS CODE

KORSAL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: EF
2004 | Sparse
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT, PF 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.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: De, DPS, DPT, NStr, PF, 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

Cameron EK. 2001. *Korthalsella salicornioides* discovered close to Auckland city. Auckland Botanical Society Journal 56: 53–54.
de Lange PJ, Rolfe JR, Barkla JW, Courtney SP, Champion PD, Perrie LR, Beadel SM, Ford KA, Breitwieser I, Schönberger I, Hindmarsh-Walls R, Heenan PB, Ladley K. 2018. Conservation status of New Zealand indigenous vascular plants, 2017. *New Zealand Threat Classification Series 22*. Department of Conservation, Wellington, NZ. 82 p. https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/science-and-technical/nztcs22entire.pdf.
Nickrent DL, Malécot V, Vidal-Russell R, Der JP. 2010. A revised classification of Santalales. *Taxon 59*: 538–558. https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.592019.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001.

ATTRIBUTION

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

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/korthalsella-salicornioides/

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