

Leptinella featherstonii

COMMON NAMES

Chatham Island button daisy, mutton bird plant

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: CI, CD, IE, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Monoecious, woody to subwoody, robust, grey-green, glaucous, yellow-green to dark green, leafy shrub up to 1.5 x 2 m. Stems 1-many, at first erect, then spreading, rarely decumbent, up to 20 mm diameter; initially fleshy-succulent, green or orange-green with smooth glabrous to puberulent surfaces, heavily marked by old leaf scars; branches clustered, 3-4(-6) emerging from a flowering node and the nodes immediately behind depending on season and growth conditions; leaves densely clustered toward branch apex, older ones retained up to 30 mm apart, long persistent along branches beneath actively growing portion. Roots stout, orange to white, up to 2 mm diameter, arising from stem base and on occasion where branches touch the ground. Leaves simple, subsessile, 15-60 x 6-25 mm; lamina broadly obovate, slightly tapering to an ill-defined petiole, somewhat crisply fleshy or membranous depending on conditions, grey-green, glaucous, yellow-green to dark green, usually finely velutinous or puberulent, sometimes glabrous (or nearly so), hairs fine, soft, suberect, often falling with leaf maturation, midrib and principal veins usually evident on both surfaces; margin with 3 shallow obtuse triangular teeth or lobes just before apex, or entire. Peduncles finely velutinous to puberulent, shorter than leaves, 5-20 mm, ebracteate or with 1-2 small leaf-like bracts just below capitula. Capitula 10 mm diameter, surface hemispherical; involucre hemispherical; involucre bracts 10-18, unequally uni- or biseriate, broadly elliptic, fleshy, green or shades thereof, with 1-3 brown veins, sparsely pilose hairy to velutinous or glabrous, with a narrow hyaline scarious margins near apex only; pistillate florets 200, 6-seriate, 2 mm long, straight, white, cream, yellow, yellow-green or green; corolla 3x as long as wide, blunt, dentition equal; staminate florets up to 130. Cypsela 1.5 x 0.7 mm, chocolate-brown to black, compressed, without wrinkles, striated with 2 lateral, 2-4 anterior and 2-4 posterior pale ribs.

SIMILAR TAXA

None.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the Chatham Islands where it was formerly widespread on all islands. Now found only at Kaingaroa and near Ocean Bay on main island, and on SE (Rangitira), Little Mangere, the Pyramid, Forty-Fours (Motuhara), Star Keys, the Sisters, Western Reef and various rock stacks (collectively the Murumuru) beside Pitt Island.



Kaingaroa, Chatham Islands. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Kaingaroa, Chatham Islands. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT

Peaty ground near coast; usually growing in association with burrowing or nesting seabirds. But on Western Reef, growing in rock crevices enriched with nutrients imported by seals and non-burrowing seabirds.

THREATS

This species is seriously threatened at Kaingaroa on the main Chatham Island by loss of habitat through erosion; weed invasion; browsing mammals; loss of seabird activity through predation and disturbance; declining soil fertility; indiscriminate collection; storm damage; and invertebrate attack. Only one plant is known from near Ocean Bay. Beyond Chatham Island, *L. featherstonii* is abundant, and at times the dominant plant on predator-free offshore islands dominated by nesting sea birds such as albatross and mollymawks. Low levels of decline have been recorded from some of these islands but this may be natural

GENUS

Leptinella

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Leptinella featherstonii F.Muell.

SYNONYMS

Cotula featherstonii (F.Muell.) Hook.f., *Cotula renwickii* Cockayne

TAXONOMIC NOTES

The woody shrub habit is unusual in the genus, however it does seem to be correctly placed in *Leptinella*.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Spring and summer.

FRUITING

Late summer and autumn.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Papery cypselae are dispersed by wind and possibly attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Can be grown from fresh seed and cuttings but difficult to maintain in cultivation. Dislikes humidity and cannot tolerate long periods of drought. Even well established plants are inclined to sudden collapse in times of stress

ETYMOLOGY

leptinella: From the Greek word leptos (meaning slender, thin or delicate), referring to the ovary

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 54

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: CD, IE, RR

2012 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: CD, IE, RR

2009 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: CD, IE, RR

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Lloyd, D.G. 1972: A revision of the New Zealand, Subantarctic, and South American species of *Cotula*, section *Leptinella*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 10: 277-372.

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 P.J. de Lange 31 August 2006. Description from Lloyd (1972) - as *Cotula featherstonii*.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/leptinella-featherstonii/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/leptinella-featherstonii/>

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