

Lobelia physaloides

COMMON NAME

colensoa, koru

SYNONYMS

Colensoa physaloides (A.Cunn.) Hook.f.; *Pratia physaloides* (A.Cunn.) Hemsley

FAMILY

Campanulaceae

AUTHORITY

Lobelia physaloides A.Cunn.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

COLPHY

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 26

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: PD

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

2009 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: PD

2004 | Gradual Decline

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Rare large soft herb with clusters of long tubular purple flowers inhabiting coastal forest of the northern North Island. Leaves large, soft, with many small teeth along margin. Flower base a green cup and on purple fuzzy stalks. Fruit a non-fleshy 10–15 mm wide blueish or white capsule.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island (from Te Paki to about Whangarei and Tounson Kauri Forest, Poor Knights Islands, Hen Island / Taranga Island, Rakitu Island). Its remote presence on Rakitu Island off the eastern side of Great Barrier Island suggests that it was probably more widespread on the mainland than the current distribution suggests.

HABITAT

Coastal and lowland forest. Often along stream sides, or in damp sites in half-shade. Formerly common in these types of habitats within the more northerly kauri (*Agathis australis*) forest remnants.



Spirits Bay (November). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Spirits Bay (in November). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Densely branched shrub up to 1 × 1 m. Basal stems and rootstock woody. **Branches and branchlets** erect to spreading, square in cross-section, green or purple, softly hairy. **Petioles** stout, fleshy, up to 100 mm long. **Leaves** alternate, (50)–70–150–(200) × (30)–40–60–(100) mm, membranous, dark green to green, broad-ovate to ovate-oblong or elliptic oblong, apex acute to subacuminate, glabrescent, or finely hairy, with hairs concentrated on veins, leaf margins coarsely serrate. **Inflorescences** terminal racemes, (5)–10–15–(20)-flowered. **Peduncles** pubescent. **Flowers** on slender, pubescent, pedicels 20 mm long; bracts linear. **Calyx lobes** 8 mm, narrow-triangular to filiform, ciliolate. **Corolla** pubescent, 30–50 mm long, violet, dark blue, or rarely white; lower lip 3-toothed, upper deeply 2-cleft. **Fruit** a subglobose berry, 10–15 mm diameter, blue, white with blue spots or streaks or white. **Seed** 0.6–0.9 mm, broadly elliptic, broadly obovate or circular, orange to orange-brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

None

FLOWERING

May flower throughout the year. However plants are mostly found in flower between August and January

FLOWER COLOURS

Blue, Violet/Purple

FRUITING

Fruit may be present throughout the year. However, they are more common between November and March

LIFE CYCLE

Fleshy berries are dispersed by invertebrate frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and cuttings. Very fast growing and ideal in semi-shaded to shaded spots under trees, especially along stream sides. An excellent pot plant.

THREATS

As a high palatable herb this species has virtually vanished from most of its former mainland habitat. It remains abundant on islands free of browsing animals (such as Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands and Poor Knights Islands). On the mainland, plants can be found in locations inaccessible to browsing animals, such as boulder falls and cliff faces and in any location where prolonged animal control or human traffic has reduced or limited the affect of these creatures. If animal browse is removed this species can make a spectacular recovery.

ETYMOLOGY

lobelia: Named after Lobel, pioneer botanist

physaloides: Like a cape gooseberry

Taxonomic Notes

The generic position of this species has long been debated with various treatments accepting its placement in *Lobelia*, *Pratia* or the monotypic *Colensoa*. The most recent view advocated by Lammers (2011) is that this species is best treated as a *Lobelia*.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 August 2003. Description based on Allan (1961) .

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
- Lammers TG. 2011. Revision of the infrageneric classification of *Lobelia* L. (Campanulaceae: Lobelioideae). *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* 98(1): 37–62. <https://doi.org/10.3417/2007150>.
- 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>.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lobelia-physaloides/>