Melicytus micranthus

COMMON NAMES
swamp māhoe. manakura

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Zig-zagging shrub with interlacing branches bearing small wavy-edged green leaves with a pale blotch at the base and that have the vein network more visible on the underside. Twigs fuzzy. Leaves 1.5-2.3cm long, in various shapes, widest at middle, scattered along stem. Flowers small, white. Fruit dark purple.

Hauraki plains, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Hauraki plains, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Violet/Purple, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shrub up to 2 m. tall or occ. more; branches stiff ± interlaced; branchlets stiff, ± pubescent. Leavse sometimes fascicled; petioles slender 3-5- (10) mm. long, ± pubescent; lamina subcoriac., 1-2.5 × 1-2 cm., elliptic- to obovate-oblong to broad-ovate, sinuate to subcrenate, sometimes sub-entire. Flowers minute, axillary, solitary or 2-3 together; pedicels ± pubescent; ≣ with short ± ciliate rounded calyx-lobes; petals oblong, twice length of calyx; anthers broad, sessile; connective flat. ≣ calyx and petals as in ≣ ; style short, stout; stigma discoid, 3-5-lobed. Berry 3-4 mm. diam., obovoid to subglobose, dark purple; seeds (1)-4. Flowers: October - April. Fruit: November to May.

SIMILAR TAXA
Similar to juvenile kaikōmako (*Pennantia corymbosa*) and distingished by the prominent terminal lobes of leaf; often there are only two other squarish lobes, one on either side of the leaf, giving it a charateristic appearance that has been likened to webbed ducks feet. Small-leaved milk tree-tūrepo (*Streblus heterophyllus*) has distinctive juvenile foliage with deep notches, mostly near the base of the leaf, on at least some leaves, and fine serrations round th erest of the leaf margin. *Raukaua anomalus* is also similar but has a dark (rather the white) blotch at leaf base.

DISTRIBUTION
North and South Islands. Local in Eastern Canterbury, rare in Westland.

HABITAT
Lowland forst, scrub and forest margins, espically on drier sites and on alluvial ground.

GENUS
Melicytus

FAMILY
Violaceae

AUTHORITY
Melicytus micranthus (Hook.f.) Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
Elaeodendron micranthum Hook.f., Melicytus micranthus Hook.f., Melicytus micranthus Hook.f. var. micranthus, Melicytus microphyllus Colenso, Melicytus micranthus var. microphyllus (Colenso) Cheeseman

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Melicytus micranthus var. longiusculus Cheeseman is based on the hybrid combination M. micranthus x M. ramiflorus and is thus not a synonym of M. micranthus. Type locality: Neslon.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH
This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for April 2019 for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY
melicytus: From the Greek meli (honey) and kytos (hollow container), referring to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. Literally “honey-cave”
micranthus: Small flower

NVS CODE
MELMIC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 96

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, PF, RR, RF 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: DPS, DPT, NR, 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 HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 pp. 425-426.
Wilson HD, Galloway T. 1993. Small-leaved shrubs of New Zealand. Manuka Press, Christchurch, NZ. 305 p.

ATTRIBUTION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-micranthus/

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