

Melicytus orarius

SYNONYMS

None - first described in 2017

FAMILY

Violaceae

AUTHORITY

Melicytus orarius Heenan, de Lange, Courtney et Molloy

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Erect to spreading, densely branched, compact, evergreen shrub, usually up to 2.5 m tall; flowers hermaphrodite; fruits on decurved pedicels, white with mottled bluish-grey to dark mauvish-grey when mature.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand, Eastern Cook Strait Region (North, South Island and associated islands)

HABITAT

A species of exposed martime islands, islets, rock stacks, promontories and steep usually west-facing coastal slopes.



Ripe fruit, in garden, plant originally from wild at Pukerua Bay. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 01/05/1992, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Flowers on garden shrub, ex-Maud Island, Pelorus Sound. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 01/07/1985, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Erect to spreading, densely branched, compact, virgate, evergreen shrub, usually up to 2.5 m tall, sometimes up to 4 m tall in sheltered sites, in exposed sites often semi-prostrate; bark smooth, grey; main trunks up to 20 cm diameter, often becoming corky; hermaphrodite. Branchlets 1.2–2.0 mm in diameter, green to green-brown, sparsely to moderately hispidulous with patent hairs c. 0.1 mm long, terete to subterete, often slightly angled in cross-section. Adult leaves 16.0–52.0 × 8.0–22.0 mm, coriaceous, obovate, broadly obovate or narrowly obovate, sometimes broadly ovate or broadly elliptic-oblong, hypostomatic, alternate or in fascicles of 2–6 on short spur-like branchlets, often crowded; petiole 1.3–3.5 mm long, 0.4–1.4 mm wide, plano-convex, sparsely to moderately hispidulous; margins usually entire, occasionally with 1 tooth per margin, teeth confined to the distal half of the leaf, apiculus absent or minute; apex usually distinctly retuse, occasionally obtuse or truncate, apiculus absent or minute; base cuneate to obtuse; adaxial lamina glabrous, mid-green to dark-green, dull to slightly glossy, midrib hispidulous with minute scattered hairs proximally, lateral veins immersed, ± visible to obscure, veinlets obscure; abaxial lamina glabrous, paler than upper surface, midrib hispidulous with minute scattered hairs proximally, lateral veins immersed, visible, veinlets obscure. Stipules 1.0–1.5 × 0.6–1.5 mm, triangular to narrowly triangular, caducous or persistent. Inflorescences 1–3-flowered, axillary to old leaves or their petiole scars, 1 or 2 per axil on short shoots or in fascicles. Bracteoles 2, 0.6–0.9 × 0.9–1.4 mm, unequal, position variable on pedicel, from immediately below flower to near the pedicel base; broadly triangular to orbicular-triangular, rounded at apex, margins erose-ciliate, green, drying to light brown. Pedicels 1.5–2.5 mm long, decurved. Sepals 5–6, 1.0–1.3 × 1.0–1.4 mm, unequal, imbricate, triangular to broadly triangular, margins erose-ciliate, green proximally, membranous margin purple, apices subacute to obtuse. Corolla broad-cylindric, 2.3–2.5 mm long, 2.8–3.5 mm across at the widest point. Petals 4–6, 2.0–3.5 × 0.9–1.5 mm, obovate oblong, 1 prominent central nerve, distal quarter reflexed, cream to pale yellow, prominent purple margin, hyaline white at base, apices thickened and obtuse to rounded, margins erose-ciliate. Anthers sessile, oblong, 0.6–1.5 mm long, creamy yellow, connate to form an urceolate tube; appendage membranous, orange to tan, ovate-triangular to ovate-narrowly triangular, apex acuminate, fimbriate or long-fimbriate, exceeding anthers by 0.6–1.0 mm long. Nectary scale erect, basally attached to the dorsal surface of each stamen, 0.3–1.0 × 0.3–0.6 mm wide at distal end, short-oblong to obovate-oblong, glabrous, off-white or pale green, base cuneate, apices truncate to truncate-obtuse, praemorse. Pollen pale yellow. Ovary 0.8–2.0 × 0.8–1.2 mm, glabrous, broadly ovoid, green; ovules 2–3, parietal, of which usually only 1 or 2 advance to form pyrenes. Style 0.2–0.5 mm long, glabrous, green, persistent in fruit; stigmas 2(–3), 0.5–0.7 mm long, flat, spreading, off white, soon withering. Fruit 5.0–9.0 × 4.5–7.7 mm, an ellipsoid to ovoid berry, initially green, maturing to mottled bluish-grey to dark mauvish-grey and white; calyx persistent; mesocarp 0.3–0.8 mm thick, fleshy, white and/or purple. Pyrenes 1 or 2 per berry, 3.4–6.2 × 2.9–4.0 mm, ellipsoid, broadly ellipsoid to ovoid, usually terete in cross-section with 1 pyrene per fruit, plano-convex in cross-section with 2 pyrenes per fruit, when mature grey or dark grey often with black flecks or streaks, sometimes almost entirely purpleblack or light-brown, smooth, matt on the outer surface, sometimes slightly longitudinally furrowed, with a well-defined marginal ridge on one side; apex obtuse to rounded; base obtuse to rounded, with indistinct to distinct cap; endospermous, endosperm cream or white.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *Melicytus obovatus* by having a smaller stature, distinctly obovate, narrowly obovate or broadly obovate, usually lobed leaves, with the leaf apex prominently retuse; and by the hermaphrodite rather than dioecious flowers. The seeds of *M. orarius* are usually larger than those of *M. obovatus*.

FLOWERING

August – October

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, Yellow

FRUITING

October – July

THREATS

In the North Island *Melicytus orarius* is mostly known from scattered individuals, growing in fragmented coastal vegetation remnants. In these sites it is seriously at risk from invasive weeds, fire and - in some sites - roadside maintenance. Only a few - very small - near-shore island populations are known. *Melicytus orarius* is more common in the South Island, where some large, mostly secure island populations are known - but there, too, on the mainland and some near-shore islands, populations are in decline.

ETYMOLOGY

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (16 January 2018). Description based on Heenan et al. (2017)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Heenan, P.B.; Courtney, S.P.; de Lange, P.J.; Molloy, B.P.J. 2017: A revised circumscription of *Melicytus obovatus* (Violaceae) and recognition of three new species from Central New Zealand. Submitted: *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 56:

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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