Metrosideros colensoi

COMMON NAMES
rātā

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Woody long-climbing vine. Adult branches pendent. Adult leaves green, finely hairy, close-set and overlapping, sharp-tipped, surfaces without any obvious glandular spotting. Flowers terminal, fluffy, white or pink.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Slender to very slender vine up to 10 m tall. **Bark** grey to pale grey, ± tessellated, and flaking in tabular shards. **Initial stems** sparingly branched but soon much-branched, widely spreading, apices trailing and pendent. **Branchlets** subterete, pilose-pubescent (indument in mixtures or fine, short and long pilose brownish hairs). **Leaves** not markedly dimorphic, close-set to overlapping (± imbricate), submembranous to subcoriaceous, petiolate, ± subsessile; petioles 1–3 mm long, subterete; juvenile lamina 4–10 × 2–8 mm, ovate-lanceolate, base cuneate to almost truncate, apex acute to acuminate, initially yellow-green, adaxially maturing to green, abaxially paler, both surfaces finely covered in minute oil glands, and initially densely pubescent, ± glabrescent; adult lamina 8–20 × 5–20 mm, otherwise similar. **Inflorescences** terminal and lateral, white (rarely pink), comprising small, few-flowered cymes; peduncles and pedicels pubescent, peduncles 10–30 mm long, pedicels up to 3 mm long; hypanthia 5 mm long, narrowly- urceolate or -subglobose to ± funnelform, pubescent, hypanthium rim exceeding disc, calyx lobes 1.5-2.0 mm long, narrow deltoid, acute to acuminate, initially forward projecting, spreading with age. **Petals** 1.5–2.2 × 1.5–2.2 mm, orbicular, not or only scarcely exceeding calyx lobes. **Stamens** numerous, filaments 8–12 mm long, anthers yellow. **Style** 10–14 mm long, stigma capitate. **Capsule** 4-6 mm diameter, narrowly urceolate to subglobose, externally 3-ribbed, 3-valved. **Seeds** 0.6–1.1 mm long, narrowly elliptic, narrowly obovate or oblong, apex usually curved orange to orange-brown, unfilled seeds dark orange-brown.

Oct 2006. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Adaxial surface of leaves. Keith George Scenic Reserve, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 29/01/2018, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Readily distinguished from other similar small, white-flowered rata (*Metrosideros diffusa* and *M. perforata*) by the widely spreading, pendant branches, softly hairy, close-set, overlapping, ovate-lanceolate, acute to acuminate leaves (without obvious oil glands) and terminal, white to pink inflorescences.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from central Northland south), South Island (Nelson and Marlborough to Westland and southern Marlborough / North Canterbury (Napenape)).

HABITAT
Lowland to montane forest (particularly a vine seen in riparian and alluvial forest). Especially common in limestone areas on rock outcrops, in gorges, cliff faces and around cave entrances.

THREATS
When myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) was detected in New Zealand (May 2017) the conservation status was upgraded as a precautionary measure to 'Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable' because, on best advice, it was believed that no indigenous Myrtaceae had resistance to the myrtle rust disease (de Lange et al. 2018).
Myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) is an invasive fungus that threatens native myrtle species. Learn more myrtlerust.org.nz.

GENUS
Metrosideros

FAMILY
Myrtaceae

AUTHORITY
Metrosideros colensoi Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
Metrosideros pendens Colenso, Metrosideros colensoi Hook.f. var. colensoi, Metrosideros colensoi var. pendens (Colenso) Kirk

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August–October

FRUITING
December–April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Although a beautiful species, *M. colensoi* is not commonly cultivated and it has a reputation for being difficult. Like all other climbing rātā it can be grown from rooted pieces and from semi-hardwood cuttings. However like all *Metrosideros*, cuttings can be fickle to strike. This species, once established is very hardy and tolerant of a range of conditions. The long drooping (pendent) branches and terminal clusters of white fluffy flowers are especially attractive when specimens are planted to grow up a wall or along a fence.

ETYMOLOGY
metrosideros: Iron heart
colensoi: Named after William Colenso (7 November 1811 - 10 February 1899) who was a Cornish Christian missionary to New Zealand, and also a printer, botanist, explorer and politician.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the Myrtaceae of New Zealand

NVS CODE
METCOL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 22

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, De
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient 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.

ATTRIBUTION
Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (6 January 2013). Description from herbarium specimens and fresh material.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Metrosideros colensoi Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/metrosideros-colensoi/ (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/metrosideros-colensoi/

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