Nertera scapanioides

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
A delicate sprawling perennial herb which forms loose mats of ground cover. The leaves are almost heart shaped and being part of the *Coprosma* family have stipules on the stem where the leaf stalks attach. The stipules are triangular with a couple of minute hairs nearby. The fruit are bright orange little globes and are often what you will see before the plant itself.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Cream

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Creeping perennial herb, forming mats or loose cushions to approximately 5 cm deep, the hairs of the vegetative parts are approximately 0.75 mm long, 5-8 (-13) celled, more or less straight, slender, thin-walled, acicular, contorting somewhat when dry; crimson flecks on stem, petiole and margins of leaf blade; tissues not foetid. **Stems** terete, 0.4-1.0 mm diameter, glabrous or sparsely hairy (occasionally very hairy, near base of stipules); **stipules** triangular, fused above petiole base to form a low sheathing collar, lobes dark-glandular at apex, the hairs mostly near base; **petioles** to approximately 5 mm long, flattened to slightly concave above, pilose along upper margins, the hairs more or less patent; **leaf blades** to about 6.5 x 7 mm, broad-ovate to almost suborbicular, rounded at apex, cordate at base, glabrous or sometimes with hairs on proximal margins, upper surface with slightly raised midrib and lateral veins, the numerous stomata becoming prominent in dried material and appearing as minute but conspicuous pale tubercles, stomata fewer on lower surface. **Flowers** solitary, terminal, sessile between a pair of somewhat reduced leaves, bisexual, protogynous. Calyx rim-like, with 2 or 4 minute triangular lobes; corolla funnelform, tube approximately 1 mm long, the lobes 4, about 1 mm long, fully reflexed at anthesis, more or less translucent but crimson mottled externally, margins papillose; filaments approximately 1.6 mm long, entirely free, the anthers 0.4 mm long, introrse; **pollen** mid-yellow, grains appearing smooth at x400 magnification; styles free to base or slightly fused below, at maturity spreading widely, the exserted (stigmatic) parts approximately 1.5 mm long, somewhat fleshy, slightly flattened dorsiventrally, minutely papillose adaxially and over margins. **Fruit** more or less globose, approximately 4 mm diameter, orange when ripe; **Seeds** approximately 2.3 mm long, opening from base up by splitting around the margins for a short way, the lines of weakness not curving inwards over the adaxial face. Embryo about two thirds as long as seed.

Kopouatai swamp, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Kopouatai swamp, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Most similar to *Nertera dichondrifolia* which has a similar appearance and colour, upon closer examination there are numerous fine short hairs over most of this species compared to the almost hairless N. scapanoides.
When fruiting it may be possible to mistake with *Nertera depressa*, however this species has smaller leaves which have some olive/brown coloration and also if the leaves are crushed will exude a pungent foul smell as is the case with *Coprosma foetidissima*.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Te Ika-a-Māui | North Island, Te Waipounamu | South Island, Rakiura | Stewart Island, Rēkohu | Wharekauri | Chatham Island. Northern North Island South to Southland, less commonly known from Central Plateau in the North to Aurthur's Pass in the South.

HABITAT
Coastal to Montane (0-1200 m.a.s.l.). Often found in peaty wetlands in areas where Sphagnum mosses also occur.

THREATS
Wetland destruction via human development and/or degradation by stock grazing.

GENUS
Nertera

FAMILY
Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY
Nertera scapanioides Lange

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November-January

FRUITING
November-May(-July)

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
nertera: Lowly, low growing
scapanioides: Like Scapania, a liverwort

NVS CODE
NERSCA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 44

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 At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR 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: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, RR, 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

Gardner RO. 1999. Nertera scapanioides (Rubiaceae) redescribed. *New Zealand Natural Sciences. 24:* 9 – 19. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/f7a6ceea-dfa6-48af-88ae-14b3ca3e0c67/content

ATTRIBUTION

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/nertera-scapanioides/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026