

Notelaea cunninghamii

COMMON NAMES

black maire

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Large tree bearing pairs of dark green wavy leaves that underneath are pale green and with the network of veins visible. Bark square-patterned. Leaves 7-15cm long by 1.5-4.5cm wide, juvenile leaves long and very thin. Fruit red, 10-15mm long, containing a single hard seed.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout gynodioecious spreading tree up to 25 m tall usually forming a broadly domed canopy; trunk up to 1.5m diameter, sometimes with several arising from base, usually straight and arching, sometimes twisted; bark firm (not flaking), grey-brown to dark brown, tessellated. Branches spreading, branchlets minutely pubescent. Leaves glabrous, coriaceous, dark green to brown-green above, $\pm$ dull, paler beneath, margins plane, entire with prominent raised midrib and side veins, borne on rigidly stout petioles 9-10(-15) mm long; lamina of juveniles 100-300 $\times$ 5-10 mm, narrow-linear, apex acute, base cuneately narrowed or attenuate; adult lamina 150-400(-600) $\times$ 20-40 mm, lanceolate to ovate- or elliptic-lanceolate, obtuse or subacute, coriaceous, weakly bullate and somewhat rough to touch; midrib and side veins impressed above (prominent below). Inflorescence a stout 8-12(-20)-flowered raceme 10-25 mm long; rachis and pedicels densely pubescent. Male flowers with 2 large exserted anthers, ovary mostly rudimentary (occasionally functional); female flower with 2 sessile barren anthers, ovary with large 2-lobed stigma. Drupe 15-20 mm long, ovoid, flesh red, orange-red to purple-black; endocarp 10-18 $\times$ 6-9 mm, dull, pale orange-yellow, narrowly elliptic, elliptic to broadly elliptic, terete (sometimes weakly compressed). Seed purple-brown.



Nestegis cunninghamii - close up of upper leaf surface. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Nestegis cunninghamii - leaf underside showing distinctive venation. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from the other three New Zealand species by the long, broadly lanceolate leaves with dark green slightly bullate upper surfaces and pale green undersides; by the entire leaf margins; and by the conspicuous leaf venation so evident on the leaf under surfaces. The inflorescences of *Notelaea cunninghamii* are also pubescent while those of the other three indigenous species are usually glabrous, or if pubescent then minutely and sparsely so. The juvenile foliage of *Notelaea cunninghamii* is very similar to *N. neolanceolata* but differs by its dull rather than glossy adaxial surface. The mature branches of *N. cunninghamii* are consistently minutely pubescent those of the other species are either glabrous or sparsely puberulent.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island, South Island, Te-Hauturu-o-Toi / Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island). Scarce north of Auckland and often uncommon over wide parts of its former lowland range due to it being preferentially logged by early settlers. In the North Island black maire is now most commonly seen in the main axial ranges and Central Volcanic Plateau. In the South Island extending to Napenape in the east and near Greymouth in the west.

HABITAT

Widespread in coastal to montane forest. Often prominent in riparian Podocarp forest and on the Podocarp forests developed on the ignimbrite and pumice country of the Central Volcanic Plateau. As a rule black maire seems to prefer more frost prone habitats than White Maire (*Nestegis lanceolata*) though both species often grow together. Black maire is also common host for white mistletoe (*Tupeia antarctica*) in the Central Volcanic Plateau, Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa.

GENUS

Notelaea

FAMILY

Oleaceae

AUTHORITY

Notelaea cunninghamii (Hook.f.) Hong-Wa & Besnard

SYNONYMS

Olea cunninghamii Hook.f., *Gymnelaea cunninghamii* (Hook.f.) L.A.S.Johnson; *Nestegis cunninghamii* (Hook.f.) L.A.S.Johnson

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–November

FRUITING

December–April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed. Difficult from cuttings. Black Maire deserves to be more widely grown as it makes an excellent specimen or street tree and once established is remarkably drought and cold tolerant. The fruit is avidly eaten by many birds especially kereru (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*).

ETYMOLOGY

cunninghamii: Named after Allan Cunningham (1791–1839) who was an English botanist and explorer, primarily known for his travels to Australia (New South Wales) and New Zealand to collect plants. Author of *Florae Insularum Novae Zelandiae Precursor*, 1837–40 (Introduction to the flora of New Zealand).

NVS CODE

NESCUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 46

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 Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.

Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 428 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for the NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 9 February 2011. Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/notelaea-cunninghamii/>

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