

Ourisia modesta

COMMON NAMES

creeping foxglove

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial, creeping herb up to 70 mm tall, with ascending inflorescences and repent leaves; stems 0.6–1.3 mm thick; internodes 6–22 mm long, clearly separate, glabrous or eglandular hairy. Leaves opposite; petiole 4.5–33.7 × 0.4–1.2 mm, mostly glabrous, leaf lamina 4.0–15.0 × 4.6–12.3 mm, broadly ovate, circular, or elliptic, apex rounded, base truncate or weakly cordate, sometimes slightly cuneate, margin subentire or irregularly notched, upper surface glabrous, finely and densely punctate, undersides glabrous, densely punctate. Inflorescence 25–90 mm long, racemose, ascending, bracteates, with 1–2-flowering nodes per inflorescence, 2 bracts and 1 flower per node, and c. 1–2 flowers per raceme; peduncle 0.6–1.1 mm wide, eglandular hairy. Floral bracts 3.7–9.3 × 3.9–9.3 mm, decreasing in size toward inflorescence apex, petiolate to sessile, broadly ovate to ovate, rarely elliptic to circular, margin subentire or irregularly notched, glabrous or sparsely eglandular hairy on margins and petiole, otherwise upper surface densely punctate. Flowers 5.7–8.9 × 2.5–7.2 mm, white. Pedicel 2.3–15.8 mm long, sparsely eglandular hairy. Calyx 3.7–8.2 × 2.7–6.7 mm, irregular, glabrous, densely punctate, rarely sparsely eglandular hairy. Corolla 6.6–9.0 × 7.7–9.0 mm, bilabiate, tubular-funnelform, glabrous or rarely externally furnished with sparse, short, eglandular hairs; tube 3.3–6.3 × 2.8–3.8 mm at apex; corolla lobes 1.7–3.5 × 0.9–2.0 mm, slightly spreading, slightly obcordate, emarginated or apical margin undulate. Stamens 4, two long stamens 4.5–5.3 mm, two short stamens 2.6–4.6 mm, anthers reniform to horse-shoe-shaped, staminode 0.3–0.4 mm long or absent. Style 2.2–3.9 × 0.2–0.5 mm, capitate or emarginated; ovary 1.5–2.3 × 1.3–1.7 mm. Capsules 4.4–5.2 × 4.2–6.0 mm, glabrous, fruiting pedicels 17.0–31.3 mm long. Seeds 0.7–0.8 × 0.5–0.7 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily confused with sterile specimens of *Viola filicaulis* from which it is most easily identified by having opposite, exstipulate rather than alternate stipulate leaves.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the North, South and Stewart Islands. In the North Island known only from one site in the North West Ruahine Ranges, where it has not been seen recently.



Flowering cultivated plant ex Catlins.
Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken:
30/11/2021, Licence: CC BY.



Ruahine Range. Nov 1976. Photographer: Colin
C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT

Beech forest alongside rivers, usually in seepages or on poorly drained terraces amongst leaf litter or in muddy hollows, sometimes associated with stream and river banks, or in flushes within subalpine scrub.

THREATS

The exact extent of decline or the degree of threat this small herb actually faces is unclear. It would appear to have recently gone extinct in its only known North Island location, perhaps through natural succession to taller plants. In the South Island some populations have been lost as a result of weeds spreading into its habitat. However, as the species is very cryptic it is easily overlooked so it is possible that some of those populations believed to have gone are still there, while the exact distribution of the species remains unclear.

GENUS

Ourisia

FAMILY

Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY

Ourisia modesta Diels

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - January

FRUITING

January - February

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult and should not be removed from the wild.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for September 2009](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

ourisia: After Ouris, governor of the Falkland Islands

modesta: Mild or modest

NVS CODE

OURMOD

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 48

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, PD, Sp

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: Sp

2004 | Gradual Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPT, NStr, OL 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

de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Norton, D.A.; Rolfe, J.R.; Sawyer, J.W.D. 2010: Threatened Plants of New Zealand, Christchurch, Canterbury University Press. 471pp

Meudt, H.M. 2006: Monograph of *Ourisia* (Plantaginaceae). *Systematic Botany Monographs* 37. 188pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared for NZPCN by: P.J. de Lange 28 October 2009. Description based on Meudt (2006) - see also de Lange et al. (2010).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ourisia-modesta/>

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25 May 2026