Pimelea traversii subsp. traversii

COMMON NAMES
Travers' pimelea

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Bushy shrub to 60cm tall erect branches bearing pairs of fleshy oval leaves, hairy white and pink flowers and dry fruit inhabiting the eastern South Island. Leaves 3-6mm long by 2-4mm wide, leaves underneath flowers are larger. Fruit hairy, enclosing black seed.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
A much-branched small to mediumsized shrub up to 600 mm tall. Branches erect and fastigiate; branchlets hairy at leaf axils and on receptacles, internodes glabrous or sometimes very sparsely hairy (in strips not covered by node buttress tissue). Node buttresses occupy the whole or most of the internode, medium to dark brown or black, usually prominent after leaf fall, stems aging grey-brown, grey or black. Internodes 1–4 mm long. Leaves decussate, ascending to patent, often closely imbricate, on very short petioles (0.2 mm) or sessile. Lamina medium olive green, sometimes red-margined, thick and coriaceous, broad elliptic to broad ovate, sometimes oblong or obovate, 3–6 × 2–4 mm, slightly keeled, concave above, obtuse, base angustate or cuneate. Margins thickened, slightly down-turned; midvein evident on under side, lateral veins obscure. Stomata evident only on under sides. Inflorescences many-flowered, pedicels 0.2 mm long, persistent. Involucral bracts 4, usually wider than the leaves (6–9 × 4–8 mm). Plants gynodioecious. Flowers hairy on outside; inside densely hairy in ovary portion and lower tube, sometimes sparsely hairy in upper tube; fragrant, white, sometimes pinkish with red lower tube. Calyx lobes open in salverform fashion. Female tube narrow to 6 mm long, ovary portion 1.0-1.5 mm, calyx lobes 1.0-2.0 × 1.3 mm. Staminodes short, at mouth of tube. Female tube to 9 mm long, ovary portion 3 mm, calyx lobes 4 × 2.2 mm; anther filaments inserted below mouth of tube; anthers yellow. Ovary with abundant hair at summit, less densely hairy to about half-way down. Fruits ovoid, green, drying brown, 4 mm long. Seeds ovoid, 3.5 × 1.6 mm. Dried hypanthia persistant and dispersing with fruits inside.

Dry River, Tresslick Basin. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Licence: All rights reserved.

Pimelea traversii. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Pimelea traversii subsp. boreus is confined to north-eastern Marlborough where it grows on limestone and other calcareous rocks. It differs from subsp. traversii by its taller size, larger leaves and by the presence of sparse hairs on the stem internodes. Pimelea traversii subsp. exedra is (at least so far) known from one site on the Livingston Range where it grows on ultramafic rocks. It differs from subsp. traversii by the smaller grow habit (up to 250 mm tall) and by having larger flowers. As some of these distinctions seem fairly arbitrary it is clear that further critical study of the range of variation in P. traversii using cytological and molecular techniques is needed.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (Marlborough, Canterbury, and Central Otago).

HABITAT
In the drier parts of the eastern South Island where it is usually found on arenite or very rarely on limestone. A common species of montane to alpine regions where it grows on rock outcrops and stable stone fields, moraines, landslides, and sometimes in grey scrub or grassland

GENUS
Pimelea

FAMILY
Thymelaeaceae

AUTHORITY
Pimelea traversii Hook.f. subsp. traversii

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October – April

FRUITING
December - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Fickle. Can be grown from cuttings, and occasionally seed germinates in garden conditions. Does best in full sun on a well drained soil. However, even well established plants are prone to sudden collapse.

ETYMOLOGY
pimelea: from Greek pimelē, meaning “lard” or “soft fat,” presumably referring to the oily seeds or fleshy cotyledons.
traversii: Named after William Thomas Locke Travers (1819-1903) who was an Irish lawyer, magistrate, politician, explorer, naturalist, photographer. He lived in New Zealand from 1849 and was a fellow of the Linnean Society.

NVS CODE
PIMTST

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NR, NStr, 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

Burrows, C.J. 2008: Genus Pimelea (Thymelaeaceae) in New Zealand 1. The taxonomic treatment of seven endemic, glabrous-leaved species. New Zealand Journal of Botany 46: 127-176.

ATTRIBUTION

Description based on Burrows (2008).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pimelea-traversii-subsp-traversii/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026