Pittosporum cornifolium

COMMON NAMES
tāwhiri karo

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, PF
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Shrub often growing on other trees with whorls of thin twigs bearing whorls of 3-5 oval pointed leaves and reddish flowers on long stalks. Leaves 3.5-7.5cm long. Fruit a capsule, 1.5cm wide, splitting into two to display black seeds in an orange pith.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Sparingly branched, 1–4 m tall shrubs, epiphytic or terrestrial. Leaves mostly inserted whorled at nodes. Lamina elliptic, 20–100 x 10–50 mm, almost sessile, petioles 2–3 mm long and wide; margins flat, apices just acute; venation on adaxial obscure with a flat midrib, abaxial with about 8 veins at an acute angle, reticulate/obscure. Inflorescences pseudo-terminal, 3–5 flowered umbels (male) 1–3 smaller flowers (female), pedicels from 2 mm (female)–15 mm long (male); subtended by foliose bracts in a basal involucre; buds mauve/purple, pointed and furled in distal third *Sepals* cream-green, very narrow triangular/acuminate, 4–7 mm long, cohering basally then free; subulate with sparse hairs on margins only. Petals bicoloured or not: outer surface mauve, pink, orange or yellow , inner surface cream/yellow; 8–12 mm long, apically acuminate, cohering in a tube at anthesis then recurving by half, almost fully exposing anthers in male flowers. Male flowers with anthers oblong, slightly apiculate; pistil reduced/narrowed. Female flowers with staminodes not beyond the turgid ovary, style slender about the same length as the ovary, stigma lobed/capitate. Fruits orange-brown, mainly bi- or less frequently tri-valved; ovoid, 15–17 mm x 12–15 mm wide; valves fairly thick (1–2 mm), silky hairy, becoming slightly rugulose with transverse ridging, reflexing totally; inner chambers bright orange-red, rugulose; placentas raised triangular at the bases; funicles orange, strappy, 5 mm long, inserted base to middle. Seeds black, 4 (–10); 3.0–6.5 mm diameter or long; rounded, angular, glossy, pellucid

SIMILAR TAXA
None.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: Three Kings, North and northern South Island.



Fruit, Whanganui Inlet. Photographer: Simon Walls, Date taken: 01/10/2007, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Maungakotukuku Valley, Paraparaumu. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT
Sea level to about 800 m a.s.l. Usually epiphytic in dense forest but also common as a rupestral on cliffs and rocky ground.

GENUS
Pittosporum

FAMILY
Pittosporaceae

AUTHORITY
Pittosporum cornifolium A.Cunn.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Pittosporum roimata Gemmill & S.N.Carter was segregated from *P. cornifolium* by Carter et al. (2018) as a Poor Knights Islands endemic. The new species was distinguished by its allopatry, a one base pair mutation (nrDNA ITS sequence), larger, wider leaves, shorter petioles and yellow flowers. However, such morphological characters also occur throughout the northern range of *Pittosporum cornifolium* and the sequence difference was not published and needs further testing. Furthermore, flower colour is variable in most New Zealand *Pittosporum*, and yellow flowers are not exclusive to *P. roimata*, they are also found in *P. cornifolium*. For these reasons *P. roimata* is included here within the concept of *P. cornifolium* adopted by Cooper (1956).

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
June to September

FRUITING
Throughout the year but especially between May - August

PLANT OF THE MONTH
This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for October 2013 for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY
pittosporum: Pitch seed
cornifolium: Cornel-leafed

NVS CODE
PITCOR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 24

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: CD, DPS, DPT, NStr, PF 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

Carter, S. N.; Miller, S.; Meyer, S. J.; Gemmill, C. E. C. 2018: A new species of *Pittosporum* described from the Poor Knights Islands, Northland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Systematic Botany 43*: 663-643
Cooper, R.C. 1956: The Australian and New Zealand species of *Pittosporum*. *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden 43*: 87–188.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 July 2024. Description from live plants and herbarium specimens.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-cornifolium/ (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-cornifolium/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026