Pterophylla sylvicola

COMMON NAMES
Towai, tawhero

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Small tree with a blotched trunk bearing leaves consisting of three bluntly-toothed leaflets (lowest pair much smaller) and spikes of small white bristly flowers inhabiting northern North Island. Leaf stem grooved on top, slightly hairy (lens needed). Juveniles with up to nine pairs of leaflets, reddish underneath.

At Tokatea, Coromandel, November. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tree up to 15 metres tall or larger with a trunk up to 1 m. diametre; young branchlets, petioles, peduncles and pedicels ± densely pilose-pubescent. Leaves of seedlings simple to 5-jugate, some pairs trifoliolate, membraneous; leaflets up to 3 × 1 cm., elliptic to elliptic-obovate in outline, incised-serrate. Leaves of juveniles and of reversion shoots up to 10-jugate, membraneous; leaflets ovate-elliptic to elliptic or elliptic-oblong, acute to subacute; terminal lflt up to 8 × 3 cm., on petiolule c. 1 cm. long; lateral subsessile, diminishing downward from 6 × 3 cm. to 2.5 × 2 cm. Leaves of adults of two main forms (intermediate forms not infrequent): (a) leaflets mostly obtuse, 3-5-foliolate, rarely simple, coriaceous., bluntly crenate-serrate to serrate, obovate-oblong to broad-elliptic or elliptic; terminal leaflet 4-6 × 2-3 cm., on petiolule c. 1 cm. long; lateral 4-3 × 2 cm.;- (b) leaves 3-5-foliolate, rarely simple, coriaceous, leaflets mostly acute to subacute, serrate to crenate-serrate, elliptic; terminal leaflet 4-7 × 2-3 cm., lateral 7-4 × 3-2 cm. Racemes 8-12 cm. long, many-flowered, pedicels 2-3 mm. long, numerous axis; sepals c. 1 mm. long, narrow-ovate to subulate-obtuse, persistent; petals c. 1·5 cm. long, ovate to oblong, white to pale rose; stamens exserted; styles 2.5-4 mm. long, persistent. Capsules 4-5 cm. long, glab. or nearly so; seeds with tuft of hairs at apex and base.

Rainbow Falls, Kerikeri River. Mar 2007. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
The juvenile foliage is similar to that of Ackama rosifolia. It can be distinguished by the lack of domatia on the underside of the leaves. Towai also has narrow, linear stipules that fall off early.

DISTRIBUTION
Occurs from Te Paki as far as the Waitakere Ranges and Kaimai Range.

GENUS
Pterophylla

FAMILY
Cunoniaceae

AUTHORITY
Pterophylla sylvicola (Sol. ex A.Cunn.) Pillon et H.C.Hopkins

SYNONYMS
Weinmannia sylvicola Sol. ex A.Cunn.; Weinmannia silvicola Sol. ex A.Cunn. orth. var.; Weinmannia silvicola Sol. ex A.Cunn. var. silvicola, Weinmannia silvicola var. betulina (A.Cunn.) Hook.f.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Pterophylla sylvicola var. *betulina* is not regarded as distinct from *P. sylvicola* by the NZPCN as the characters attributed to it occur sporadically throughout the range of *P. sylvicola* s.s. However, it is true that in some more southerly populations the form known as var. *betulina* can be dominant.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

NVS CODE
PTESYL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 30

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 Not Threatened 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, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I. Goverment Printer, Wellington.
McKenzie, R. 1960. The distributional overlap of *Weinmannia sylvicola* and *Weinmannia racemosa*. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 17: 7-8

ATTRIBUTION
Fact Sheet prepared by P. J. de Lange 17 November 2011: Description adapted from Allan (1961)
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MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pterophylla-sylvicola/

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