

# Senecio esleri

## COMMON NAMES

Esler's fireweed

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: TO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

## FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Erect herb, usually annual, rarely a short-lived perennial, up to c. 2 m tall. Stems striate, often tinged purple, sparsely to densely setose especially above, branched above to form inflorescence. Lower cauline leaves almost glabrous to sparsely setose on upper surface, almost glabrous to moderately setose on lower especially on mid vein, apetiolate and longcuneate, 1-pinnatifid to 1/2-2/3 width, elliptic to narrow-obovate, acute at apex, c. 80-200 X 15-80 mm; segments narrow- to ovate-oblong, irregularly toothed; mid cauline leaves slightly larger, more deeply dissected with narrow-oblong toothed segments, sometimes amplexicaul and often 3-fid at base; uppermost leaves more ovate, sometimes with more or less linear segments. Capitula in loose panicles, 1-2 mm diameter. Supplementary bracts 3-10, lanceolate, ciliolate, 1-2 mm long. Involucral bracts (11>12-13, linear, usually glabrous, sometimes with a few scattered hairs, 4.5-5.5 mm long. Outer florets c. 24-35, female, filiform; inner florets c. 4-11, hermaphrodite, tubular. Achenes narrowly ellipsoid-cylindric, slightly narrowed and constricted below apex, with 2-3 rows of short antrorse hairs in grooves between or on edges of broad ribs and sometimes appearing evenly hairy, 2-2.3 mm long; pappus 5-7 mm long.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Similar to *Senecio bipinnatisectus* but can be distinguished from that species by the setose stems, less divided lower leaves, greater number of involucral bracts, and hairier achenes. *S. hispidulus* var. *dissectus* is also similar but this is immediately distinguished by the less dissected upper cauline leaves and the densely hispid upper surface of the leaf lamina. See Thompson, I.R. 2006: A taxonomic treatment of the tribe Senecioneae (Asteraceae) in Australia. *Muelleria* 24: 51-110.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand, North Island from Te Pahi to Rotorua (see de Lange 1997, 1995; P. J. de Lange unpubl. data). Also Australia, where it is an uncommon montane species of New South Wales and Tasmania

## HABITAT

Waste places and coastal habitats in Northland and the Auckland area. Especially roadsides, street margins, rock walls, waste places, gardens and sand dunes.



*Senecio esleri* juvenile plant showing growth habit, Westfield St Lukes, Mt Albert, Auckland. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Date taken: 18/05/2006, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Setose, purple-tinged stem. Wellsford. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 10/03/2007, Licence: CC BY.

## GENUS

Senecio

## FAMILY

Asteraceae

## AUTHORITY

Senecio esleri C.J.Webb

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

September to April

## FRUITING

October to August

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

An aggressive weedy species. *Senecio esleri* grows quickly and rapidly from seed and prefers sunny, disturbed sites

## EXTRA INFORMATION

*Senecio esleri* was first described from New Zealand by Webb (1989) who considered it to be an introduced weed (but with little elaboration as to why), probably of Australian origin. Subsequently Thompson (2004) described the same species from Australia as *S. brevitubulus* I.Thomps. (not realising at the time that it had already been named from New Zealand material - see Thompson 2006). de Lange & Rolfe (2010) regard *Senecio esleri* as a recent indigenous natural arrival to New Zealand. It was first recorded in New Zealand from a remote part of Whangaruru Harbour, Northland in 1972 and it has subsequently spread from Northland south to Taupo.

Although weedy it is difficult to understand how such an uncommon montane Australian species could have been introduced to New Zealand by human agency (deliberate or accidental). Further, its pattern of arrival and spread is identical to many other "weedy" species accepted as indigenous, e.g., *Picris angustifolia*, *Senecio hispidulus* (glabrous form). One peculiar facet of New Zealand botany is the assumption that our indigenous flora is somehow static and so anything new (i.e. indigenous) that appears (meaning that it was not recorded by botanists working in the 1800s and early 1900s) and which is shared with Australia (or the South Pacific) is automatically naturalised. Heenan & de Lange (2009) argued that for those plants found within these regions and whose seed is suited to long distance dispersal, claims of indigenous or naturalised status needs to be carefully evaluated and explained on a case by case basis.

## ETYMOLOGY

**senecio:** From the Latin senex 'old man' (probably referring to the bearded seeds)

## NVS CODE

SENE SL

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: TO

2012 | Not Threatened

2004 | Exotic

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, TO, TL 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

- de Lange, P.J. 1995: *Senecio esleri* makes it into the Waikato. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 50: 42-43.
- de Lange, P.J. 1997: *Senecio esleri* straggles into Hamilton City. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 52: 26
- de Lange, P.J.; Rolfe, J.R. 2010: New Zealand Indigenous Vascular plant Checklist. Wellington, New Zealand Plant Conservation Network
- Heenan, P.B.; de Lange, P.J.; Keeling, J. 2009: *Alternanthera nahui*, a new species of Amaranthaceae indigenous to New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 47(1): 97–105.
- Thompson, I.R. 2004: Taxonomic studies of Australian *Senecio* (Asteraceae): 1. The disciform species. *Muelleria* 19: 101–214.
- Thompson, I.R. 2006: A taxonomic treatment of tribe Senecioneae (Asteraceae) in Australia. *Muelleria* 24: 65.
- Webb, C.J. 1989: *Senecio esleri* (Asteraceae), a new fireweed. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 27: 565-567.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (12 July 2005). Description based on Webb (1989)

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/senecio-esleri/>

## PDF DATE

08 June 2026