Senecio quadridentatus

COMMON NAMES
cotton fireweed, white fireweed, pahokoraka

BIOSTATUS
Native

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Short-lived, usually much branched, perennial herb up to 1 m tall. Stems erect, moderately to densely covered in appressed-cottony hairs. Mid stem leaves more or less evenly spaced and sized., linear to narrow linear, 80-220 mm long, length:width ratio (l:w) 15-40 (or 7-10 if lobes present), mostly entire, rarely dissected or lobed, sometimes coarsely dentate to lobate; segments remote 1-3 per side and mainly in proximal half, spreading, triangular, base attenuate or occasionaly with small entire auricles, not amplexicaul; margin entire or with frequentminute denticulations, appearing entire due to revolute margin; upper surface hairs appressed-cobwebby becoming glabrescent; lower surface green or purple-green, moderately to densely woolly. Upper stem leaves similar; auricles more frequent. Unit Inflorescence usually of many capitula; total number of capitula per stem often 50-200; overtopping variable; mature lateral peduncles mostly 5-25 mm long. Calycular bracteoles of capitula 4-8, 1.0-3.0 mm long peduncle and margin of bracteoles cobwebby to woolly at anthesis, or glabrate; involucre 6.0-10.0 x 1.2-2.0 mm; involucral bracts 8-14, basally cobwebby or glabrate, with apex erect; stereomes (in dried material) more or less flat, green or partially purple, sometimes minutely black-tipped or purple in a zone 1 mm long below tip. Florets 18-50, c. 80% female; corolla-lobes triangular, not or hardly thickened apically; corolla of bisexual florets 6-9 mm long, 4-lobed; corolla-lobes of female florets 3, 0.1 mm long. Cypsela 2.2-3.5 mm long, subcylindric, narrow to and constricted below apex, usually with 2-3 rows of hairs in narrow grooves between broad ribs, sometimes glabrous.

SIMILAR TAXA
Seencio dunedinensis Belcher is similar and could be confused. Generally it is a smaller less heavily branched plant, with much wider dark green to purple-green glabrescent leaves. The involucral bracts are 4–6 mm rather than 6–10 mm long. *Senecio quadridentatus* tends to grow at lower elevations than *S. dunedinensis* but at times the two species are sympatric and some of the variation seen between both species may be due to hybridism.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. Three Kings, North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands. Present in Australia

Remutaka Rail Trail. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/12/2006, Licence: CC BY.

Leaf base. Remutaka Rail Trail. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/12/2006, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT
Throughout from coastal to subalpine habitats. Always in recently distrubed ground

GENUS
Senecio

FAMILY
Asteraceae

AUTHORITY
Senecio quadridentatus Labill.

SYNONYMS
Erechtites quadridentata (Labill.) DC.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Unpublished Molecular evidence (nrDNA ITS sequences) held by University of Auckland place this species as sister to *S. marotiri* and *S. dunedinensis*.

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–March

FRUITING
December–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed. The silvery white foliage can be quite attractive but this species is invasive. Prefers full sun.

ETYMOLOGY
senecio: From the Latin senex ‘old man’ (probably referring to the bearded seeds)

NVS CODE
SENQUA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO
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: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, EF, PF, SO 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.
Otago: 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. 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

Thompson IR. 2004. Taxonomic studies of Australian *Senecio* (Asteraceae): 1. The disciform species. *Muelleria 19*: 101–214.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (12 July 2005). Description based on Thompson (2004).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/senecio-quadridentatus/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026