

Shawia ilicifolia

COMMON NAMES

hakeke, mountain holly

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 spreading tree bearing dark-green to greyish-green leathery leaves with jagged, spiny margins. Bark flaking in long strips. Leaves 5–12 cm long × 1–2 cm wide. Flowers numerous, borne in dense clusters toward branchlet apices, bearing white ray florets and yellow disc-florets. Fruits small wind-borne brown seeds, surmounted by a readily detachable, fluffy, yellowish pappus.

FLOWER COLOURS

White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Much branched shrubs to small trees up to 6 × 3 m, usually forming a domed canopy unless growing in dense scrub. Trunk and lower branches covered in orange-grey bark, mature bark often semi-detached and peeling from base upwards in long strips. Branches many to few depending on conditions; branchlets pliant, initially pubescent, becoming glabrous with age, leaves usually clustered toward apices. Leaves long persistent, coriaceous borne on stout petioles 15–22 mm long; lamina 50–120 × 10–20 mm, linear-oblong to lanceolate; apices acute, acuminate, bases truncate, margins undulose, sharply serrate-dentate, teeth spinescent, adaxial surface dark green to fulvous grey-green; ± glabrous (immature and expanding leaves sparsely covered in appressed, fulvous-white tomentum), abaxially paler, finely clad in appressed fulvous-white tomentum), tomentum tending to shed with age. Inflorescence a lateral corymbose panicle, bearing 8–15(–20) capitula. Capitulum 8–12 mm long, 10–12 mm diameter. Pedicels 10–18 mm long, finely invested in fulvous-white to white appressed hairs. Involucre cylindrical, 2-seriate, outer abaxially villous, inner apically ciliate. Florets 15–20. Ray-florets 10–12(–16) pisillate, corolla glabrous, tube 2.2 mm long, ligulate with deflexed white limb 3.1–4.2 × 1.0–1.3 mm, 1–2(–3)-lobed at apex. Disc florets 5–8 per capitulum, hermaphrodite, corolla glabrous, yellow or pink, tube 2.9–3.1 mm long, lobes 5, 1.2–1.5 × 0.5 mm. Seeds (cypsela) 1.7–2.5 mm long, brown, narrowly oblong to narrowly oblong-elliptic or narrowly obovate-elliptic, longitudinally ribbed 3–6×, ribs raised; pappus caducous, 3–4 mm long, fulvous, finely barbellate.



Olearia ilicifolia, Catlins. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Olearia ilicifolia bark, Siberia Valley. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from all other New Zealand *Shawia* species on account of the leaves which have serrate-dentate (finely 'spiny') undulating margins - a feature earning this species the vernacular 'mountain holly'. *Shawia ilicifolia* readily hybridises with *S. arborescens* (these hybrids are called *S. xmacrodonta*) and less frequently with *S. lacumosa* and *S. quinquevulnera*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand, North, South and Stewart Islands from the Pukeamaru and Herangi Range south.

HABITAT

Lowland to subalpine - montane to subalpine in northern part of range but extending to lowland forest and scrub in South Island part of range. A species of shrublands, river flats and valley heads, also prominent on ridgelines in so called 'cloud' forest and 'goblin forest'. A common riparian species in the montane river systems of the western South Island.

GENUS

Shawia

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Shawia ilicifolia (Hook. f.) Saldivia & Nicol

SYNONYMS

Eurybia dentata var. *β. linearifolia* Hook. f., *Olearia ilicifolia* Hook.f., *Olearia multibracteolata* Colenso, *Aster multibracteolatus* (Colenso) Kuntze

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Some botanists regard North and South Island populations of *Shawia ilicifolia* as distinct and warranting some level of taxonomic recognition. This matter requires further critical investigation.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - February

FRUITING

April - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from semi-hardwood cuttings and fresh seed. Does best in a cool climate (dislikes hot or humid conditions). A beautiful small tree or shrub well suited to a rockery margin. Does best when planted in a well drained, moist, humus enriched soil. Does not tolerate drying out.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

shawia: After Thomas Shaw (1694-1751), English scholar and traveller.

ilicifolia: Leaves like holly (Ilex)

NVS CODE

OLEILI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 108

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 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

Saldivia, P.; Nicol, D.A. 2025: Reinstatement, broader circumscription, and infrageneric classification of *Shawia* (Astereae, Celmisiinae), a large woody genus endemic to Australasia. *Phytoneuron* 49: 1–43

Webb, C.J.; Simpson, M.J.A. 2001: Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for the NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (25 January 2015). Description mostly based on observations made from fresh and dried specimens with the seed (cypselae) description adapted from Webb & Simpson (2001).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/shawia-ilicifolia/>

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