

Trilepidea adamsii

COMMON NAMES

Adams mistletoe

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Extinct

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Extinct shrub to 1m wide growing on other trees with pairs of fleshy leaves and clusters of tubular long flowers that are greenish yellow striped with red or all pinkish. Leaves 10–60mm long by 30–40mm wide, of various shapes. Flowers expanded slightly at the middle. Fruit red, 8–9mm long.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Hemi-parasitic, glabrous, shrub up to 1 m diam. Branchlets terete. Leaves opposite, sessile or on stout petioles 2 mm long. Lamina (10-)50(-60) x 30(-40) mm, dark green above, pale green or reddish beneath; fleshy-coriaceous, broadly obovate, obovate, elliptic-oblong to rhomboid, margins recurved, veins indistinct. Inflorescence axillary, 2-4-flowered cymes. Peduncles stout, fleshy, almost woody, 10-15 mm. Flowers 30-40 mm long, sessile to subsessile, subtended by a small bract and two bracteoles. Receptacle-rim minutely 4-toothed. Tepals 4, greenish-yellow with marginal red stripes soon fading to a uniform pinkish-red, initially dilated at middle, splitting for c.1/4 length, often with dorsal split to base. Anthers narrow, basifixed, style initially = to perianth length, but elongating well beyond tepals at anthesis. Stigma capitate. Fruit red, fleshy, ellipsoid, 8-9 mm long. Hosts: *Coprosma arborea* Kirk, *Melicope ternata* J.R.Forst et G.Forst. and *Myrsine australis* (A.Rich.) Allan.

SIMILAR TAXA

Ileostylus micranthus has flattened young branchlets almost square in cross-section, leaves are broader and green, the tiny flowers are yellow-green, borne in the leaf axils, and possess a 'bent' style. *Tupeia antarctica* has tiny, green-yellow flowers with white or pink fruit and greyish-white branchlets are covered in short, soft hairs. *Peraxilla tetrapetala* has 'blistered' diamond-shaped leaves, red flowers and yellow fruit. *P. colensoi* has scarlet flowers and yellow fruit.



PLATE 12 *Elytrophthe (Trilepidea) adamsii* (Cheesem.) Engl.
Common name: New Zealand mistletoe
Family: Loranthaceae
Habit: a parasitic, bushy shrub to 1 m in diameter.

Painting by F. Osbourne from Great Barrier Island. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Townson, Hape Stream - Herbarium specimen. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island only, where it was once found from the Waipoua River to the Waikato and Coromandel Peninsula. Also recorded from Great Barrier and Waiheke Islands. Historic records indicate that this species was never common. The last specimen to be collected was made in 1954 from Sanitorium Hill (Maungakawa) in the Pakaroa Range, east of Cambridge.

HABITAT

Semi-parasitic on mamangi and other Coprosma species, red mapou, and wharangi, probably restricted to coastal and lowland kauri forest margins and associated open, seral shrubland.

THREATS

Habitat loss, over-collecting, loss of pollinators, loss of dispersers, and possum browse have all been proposed as contributing to the extinction of this species.

GENUS

Trilepidea

FAMILY

Loranthaceae

AUTHORITY

Trilepidea adamsii (Cheeseman) Tiegham

SYNONYMS

Loranthus adamsii Cheeseman, Elytranthe adamsii (Cheeseman) Engl., Trilepidea ralphii Tiegham

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(September-) October (-November)

FRUITING

November - December

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown.

STATUS NOTES

Indications are that this species is very likely to be extinct. Specific searches of all known past locations have been conducted at various times over the last 30 years. Ad hoc surveys of likely habitats have also been undertaken. If it still survives it will now be very vulnerable to possums, which were not as widespread as they are now within the former range of Trilepidea.

CULTURAL USE/IMPORTANCE

This species is used by the Network as our logo to represent our vision that “no indigenous species of plant will become extinct nor be placed at risk of extinction as a result of human action or indifference, and that the rich, diverse and unique plant life of New Zealand will be recognised, cherished and restored.” The image for the logo comes from a painting by Fanny Osbourne and is used with permission by the Auckland Museum.

Prints of a beautiful painting of Adam’s mistletoe are given to recipients of NZPCN plant conservation awards. Fanny Wickison painted this specifically for NZPCN to use in this way and a story about how she managed to render this detailed image of an extinct plant can be found in our newsletter [here](#).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for June 2004](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

adamsii: Named for James Adams (1839-1906) an exceptional amateur botanist who established the Thames High School. In 1906 he died suddenly whilst still the headmaster of the high school. He is buried in the Tararu Cemetery, Thames. James Adams was a friend of the first Auckland Museum Director Thomas Cheeseman whom he often accompanied in the field. Cheeseman commemorated Adams contributions to New Zealand Botany with the species *Brachyglottis adamsii*, *Celmisia adamsii*, and *Trilepidea adamsii*. His granddaughter was Jacqueline Nancy Adams (1926-2007) botanical illustrator, artist, botanist and phycologist whose name is also commemorated by a number of marine seaweeds.

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Extinct

2012 | Extinct

2009 | Extinct

2004 | Extinct

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Extirpated | Qualifiers: EW 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.; Heenan, P.B.; Norton, D.A.; Rolfe, J.R.; Sawyer, J.W.D. 2010: Threatened Plants of New Zealand. Christchurch, Canterbury University Press. 471pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet by P.J. de Lange (15 August 2008). Description adapted from de Lange et al. (2010).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Trilepidea adamsii* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/trilepidea-adamsii/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/trilepidea-adamsii/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026