Veronica dieffenbachii

COMMON NAMES
Kokomuka ma (Ta Re Moriori), Dieffenbach's koromiko

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Bushy shrub bearing pairs of dark green narrow leaves and spikes of white to purple flowers inhabiting coastal areas of the Chatham Islands. Leaves pale underneath, 38-74mm long by 8.5-20mm wide. Leaf bud with no gap at base. Flower spikes to 12cm long.

Hebe dieffenbachii. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Upright bushy or spreading shrub up to 2 × 3 m. Branches suberect to erect, rarely spreading and ± pendent, old stems grey or brown; branchlets green (rarely tinged maroon), puberulent, pubescent or glabrous; internodes 2.9-34.0 mm. Leaf bud distinct; sinus absent. Leaves erecto-patent to recurved; lamina elliptic, oblong-elliptic, oblanceolate to obovate, coriaceous, flat, or with recurved margins, 26.0-110.0 × 4.5-25.0 mm; apex subacute or obtuse, base truncate to subcordate or amplexicaul; margin cartilaginous, glabrous or finely ciliate; upper surface light to dark green, often glaucescent, hairy along midrib, rarely uniformly eglandular pubescent; lower surface light green or glaucescent, glabrous or minutely and uniformly pubescent. Inflorescences with 34-140 flowers, lateral, unbranched, 50-120 mm long; peduncle 9-20 mm; rachis 35-100 mm. Bracts alternate, lanceolate, linear-lanceolate or deltoid, acute to subacute, occasionally hairy outside. Flowers hermaphrodite. Pedicels 0.7-3.8 mm. Calyx 1.5-4.4 mm, 4-5-lobed, lobes lanceolate, ovate or deltoid, acute to subacute, occasionally hairy outside. Corolla tube hairy inside, 2.5-3.5 × 1.5-1.8 mm, shortly cylindric, > calyx; lobes white, elliptic or ovate, obtuse, patent to recurved, slightly shorter than corolla tube, hairy inside, or with sparse hairs toward the base on the inner surface. Stamen filaments white, 3.5-4.0 mm; anthers magenta, 1.5-1.9 mm. Nectarial disc ciliate, rarely glabrous. Ovary glabrous, sometimes hairy, 0.9-1.1 mm; style 4.0-7.3 mm, glabrous, sometimes hairy. Capsules obtuse or subacute, 3.5-5.6 × 2.7-4.3 mm, glabrous or sometimes hairy, loculicidal split ¼ way to base. Seeds flattened, ± discoid, ± smooth, brown to pale brown, 0.8-1.5 × 0.8-1.2 mm.

Chatham Islands. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Related to Veronica chathamica with which it readily forms hybrids. From that species it is distinguished by the much larger, erect to suberect shrub growth, larger leaves which are longer than wide, dark green to glaucescent above, and light green or glaucescent below, and much larger inflorescences, with uniformly white flowers. Veronica chathamica is usually found in more exposed sites on beaches and rock stacks.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: Chatham Islands (Chatham, Pitt, Mangere, South East Islands).

HABITAT
Mostly coastal where it usually grows in mixed shrubland and along forest margins. Also on limestone outcrops on the coast or inland, and it is a feature of the limestone cliffs lining Te Whanga lagoon. Rarely in coastal forest, where it often grows near petrel burrows

THREATS
A Naturally Uncommon, range-restricted island endemic. This species probably has declined and it is certainly less common than H. chathamica, however, it is still very widespread, and actively regenerating in fenced off areas. Hybridism with Veronica chathamica is an issue at some sites (e.g., Rangatira (South East Island)).

GENUS
Veronica

FAMILY
Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY
Veronica dieffenbachii Benth.

SYNONYMS
Veronica dorrien-smithii Cockayne, Hebe dorrien-smithii (Cockayne) Cockayne et Allan, Hebe dieffenbachii (Benth.) Cockayne et Allan

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December – May

FRUITING
January - December

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from cuttings and fresh seed. An attractive shrub which makes an excellent hedge and is ideal for coastal situations. Somewhat frost sensitive. Some forms sold as this species with dark mauve flowers or flowers tinged with mauve are hybrids with H. chathamica.

NOTES ON ETYMOLOGY
Dieffenbach collected the type specimen, his collection of plants and animals from the Chatham Islands was the first made by any European.

ETYMOLOGY
veronica: Named after Saint Veronica, who gave Jesus her veil to wipe his brow as he carried the cross through Jerusalem, perhaps because the common name of this plant is ‘speedwell’. The name Veronica is often believed to derive from the Latin vera ‘truth’ and iconica ‘image’, but it is actually derived from the Macedonian name Berenice which means ‘bearer of victory’.
dieffenbachii: Named after Dr. Ernst Dieffenbach, 19th century German naturalist

NVS CODE
VERDIE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Bayly, M.; Kellow, A. 2006: An illustrated guide to New Zealand Hebes. Te Papa Press, Wellington.
Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION
Fact Sheet by Peter J.de Lange (18 August 2006): Description modified from Bayly & Kellow (2006)

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/veronica-dieffenbachii/

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