

Veronica hectorii subsp. demissa

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Spreading low growing shrub bearing narrow short scaly twigs inhabiting southern South Island mountains. Twigs 1.5-2mm wide. Leaves scale-like, closely-packed, pointed, clasping stem, with a hairy margin (lens needed). Flowers white, in groups of 6-8 at tips of twigs.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Spreading low or bushy shrub to 1 m tall, of whipcord form. Branches erect or ascending or spreading; internodes 0.6-1.9 (-2.7) mm; branchlets, including leaves, 1.3-4 (-4.6) mm wide; connate leaf bases hairy (at least when young; but sometimes connate portion deeply furrowed and hairs not visible); nodal joint distinct, either hidden or exposed; leaves not readily abscising, persistent along the stem for some distance. Leaves connate, appressed; lamina 1.2-2.7 (-3.1) mm, not thickened near the apex; apex obtuse or subacute or apiculate or mucronate; margin ciliate or ciliolate (at least when young, but hairs often deciduous with age); lower surface dark green or bronze- or yellowish-green, veins not visible, glossy. Reversion leaves incised or entire, glabrous. Inflorescences with 4-16 flowers, terminal, unbranched, 0.35-1.5cm; rachis densely hairy (with long, white, tangled hairs). Bracts opposite and decussate, connate, ovate or deltoid, obtuse or apiculate or subacute, sometimes hairy outside (near basal, connate portion). Flowers hermaphrodite. Calyx 1.8-3.5 (-4.2) mm, 4-5-lobed (5th lobe small, posterior), with anterior lobes free for most of their length or united to 1/3-2/3-way to apex; lobes elliptic, obtuse or subacute, with mixed glandular and eglandular cilia (glandular hairs usually obscured by long eglandular hairs). Corolla tube hairy inside, 1.5-3.3 x 1.3-2.6 mm. cylindrical or funnellform, slightly shorter to slightly longer than calyx; lobes white at anthesis, ovate or elliptic, obtuse. suberect to recurved, longer than corolla tube. Stamen filaments 3.5-4.2 mm; anthers magenta or purple or pink, 1.1-1.7 mm. Ovary ovoid or somewhat globose, 0.6-1 mm, apex (in septum view) obtuse or slightly emarginate or didymous; ovules approximately 18-34 per locule, in 1-3 layers; style 3.3-6.5 mm. Capsules obtuse or subacute, 1.8-3.2 x 1.8-2.5 mm, loculicidal split extending 1/4-1/2-way to base. Seeds flattened, ellipsoid to oblong, more or less smooth, straw-yellow or brown, 0.9-1.4 x 0.5-0.8 mm, micropylar rim 0.2-0.5 mm.



Hebe hectorii ssp demissa. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA

Key features of the species include; anterior calyx lobes free for most of their length; leaves not obviously ribbed; conspicuous nodal joints; and internodes mostly hidden. It is most similar to *V. tetragona* and can distinguished from this species by *V. tetragona* having leaves that are thickened at their apices (to varying extents). Geographically each species does not overlap, the *V. tetragona* group are North island species and the *V. hectorii* group are South Island residents. Distinguished from *V. hectorii* subsp. *coarctata* and *V. hectorii* subsp. *hectorii* by the apices of at least some leaves on *V. hectorii* subsp. *demissa* having an apiculus or mucro greater than 0.05mm long. Geographically distinguished from *V. hectorii* subsp. *coarctata*, these two subspecies do not overlap, the former being found in the northern-west South Island, compared to *V. hectorii* subsp. *demissa* being found in the central southern South Island.

DISTRIBUTION

South Island – Otago and Southland from the Waitaki Valley and Rock and Pillar range in the east to the Forbes Mountains in the west.

HABITAT

Penalpine grassland and subalpine shrubland.

GENUS

Veronica

FAMILY

Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY

Veronica hectorii subsp. *demissa* (G.Simpson) Garn.-Jones

SYNONYMS

Hebe demissa G.Simpson, *Hebe hectorii* subsp. *demissa* (G.Simpson) Wagstaff et Wardle, *Leonohebe hectorii* var. *demissa* (G.Simpson) Heads

TAXONOMIC NOTES

The two southernmost subspecies (*demissa* and *hectorii*) probably intergrade. The shape of the leaf apices varies almost continuously, from rounded to just perceptibly apiculate, to very prominently mucronate. Mucronate-leaved plants (subsp. *demissa*) generally occur on drier mountains in the east, and obtuse-leaved plants (subsp. *hectorii*) occur on wetter mountains in the west, with some overlap (e.g. in the Forbes Mountains). Clearly demarcating the two subspecies is not straightforward and different circumscriptions (or no division at all) could be argued for. The type of *V. hectorii* is among a group of specimens that are most difficult to place that is, those with barely perceptible apicula/mucros. The circumscriptions adopted here preserve the traditional uses of the names *hectorii* and *demissa*.

Two additional subspecies of *V. hectorii* (described as distinct species by Cockayne 1909; Simpson 1952) were recognised in the recent treatment of Wagstaff & Wardle (1999). One, subsp. *laingii*, was distinguished on the basis of branchlet width. The other, subsp. *subulata*, was distinguished on the basis of mucro length. Variation in these characters, including substantial variation within single populations and small geographic areas, is such that no clear grounds have been found for the recognition of these subspecies. Subsp. *laingii* is included here under subsp. *hectorii*, and subsp. *subulata* is included under subsp. *demissa*.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(November-) December-March (-April)

FRUITING

(January-) February-June (-December)

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'.

hectorii: Named after Sir James Hector, 19th century New Zealand geologist and botanist who was originally from Scotland

NVS CODE

VERHSD

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

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REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NR, NS, NStr, Sp, TL
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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

Bayly, M.J., Kellow, A.V. 2006. An illustrated guide to New Zealand Hebes. Wellington, N.Z.: Te Papa press pg. 94-98.

Cockayne, L. 1909. *Report on a Botanical Survey of Stewart Island*. Wellington: Government Printer.

Simpson, G. 1952. Notes on some New Zealand plants and descriptions of new species (no. 5).

Transactions of the Royal Society of New Zealand 79: 419-35.

Wagstaff, S. J. and Wardle, P. 1999. Whipcord hebes - systematics, distribution, ecology and evolution. New Zealand Journal of Botany 37: 17-39.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by M. Ward from Bayly & Kellow (2006).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/veronica-hectorii-subsp-demissa/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026