

Veronica speciosa

COMMON NAMES

purple hebe

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Low growing shrub bearing pairs of oval dark green glossy leathery leaves and spikes of magenta flowers inhabiting coastal areas between the Marlborough Sounds and Northland. Leaves to 100 mm long by 51 mm wide, with fringe of hairs. Leaf bud with small gap at base. Flower spike to 15 cm long.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

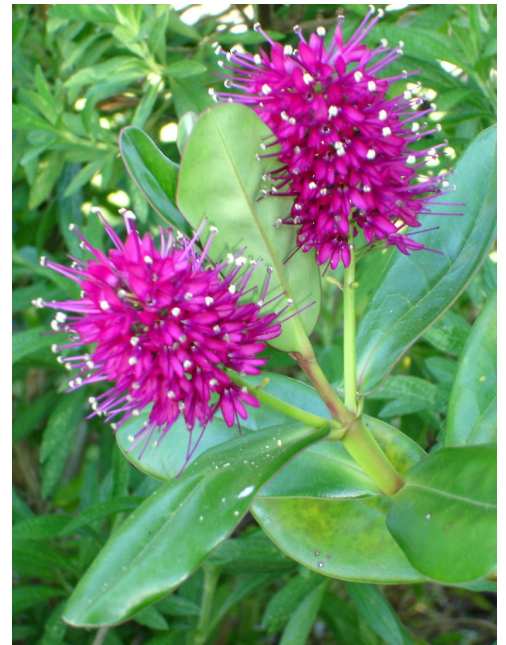
Spreading to somewhat sprawling shrub up to 2 × 3 m. **Branches** stout, becoming woody at base, spreading to sprawling, rarely erect, often layering on contact with ground. **Branchlets** stout, pliant, glabrous, yellow-green to green, internodes variable in length, though much longer than stem diameter. **Leaf-bud** with distinct sinus, glabrescent. **Petiole** stout, fleshy 5–20 mm. **Leaves** numerous, coriaceous, fleshy to almost succulent, glabrescent except of lamina margin, 50–200 × 25–80 mm, dark green, green to yellow-green and glossy above, much paler beneath, broadly elliptic to obovate-oblong or oblong, apex obtuse, often retuse, base obtuse; lamina margin distinctly enlarged, red-pigmented, finely pubescent. **Inflorescence** a simple, lateral, erect raceme 30–80 × 30–40 mm. **Peduncle** robust, fleshy, glabrous, 30–50 mm long. **Flowers** rather fleshy, rather crowded on raceme. **Pedicels** 2–8 mm, exceeding the bracts. **Bracts** narrowly subulate, ciliolate. **Calyx-lobes** 2–3 mm long, greenish-yellow to dark green, subacute, ciliolate. **Corolla-tube and lobes** dark magenta or red, 4–5 × 3–5 mm, exceeding calyx, lobes 5–6 mm long, obtuse, ciliolate. **Capsules** stout, robust, 6 × 4 mm, brown to dark brown, broadly ovate, apex acute, coriaceous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Unlikely to be confused with other naturally occurring hebe sp. However, its extensive use in horticultural as parental stock for hybridism has resulted in numerous cultivars some of which have been sold, incorrectly, as *Veronica speciosa*. From the majority of these *V. speciosa* can be distinguished by its magenta-coloured flowers, and dark green to pale green fleshy leaves which always have a pink-red pigmented, finely hairy leaf margin.



Flowering plant, ex cult, unknown provenance.
Photographer: Andrea Brandon, Date taken: 01/01/2003, Licence: CC BY-NC.



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

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (formerly from Scots Point to Urenui, now known only on the west coast from outer South Head (Hokianga Harbour), Maunganui Bluff, near Muriwai Beach, at two sites on cliffs west of Aotea Harbour, Mokau), South Island (formerly several sites in the Marlborough Sounds, now at Titirangi Bay (Marlborough sounds). Recently it has been suggested that only the outer South Head, Maunganui Bluff and Muriwai populations are natural, the others resulting from past deliberate cultivation by Māori.

HABITAT

Coastal cliffs and headlands, in low windswept scrub and flaxland. Rarely under taller trees.

THREATS

Threatened by weed invasion of its coastal habitat, browsing animals, and genetic pollution through planting of other hebe sp. and cultivars in the vicinity of wild populations. DNA based research has discovered that populations south of West Auckland (Muriwai) stem from deliberate past Māori plantings of this attractive red-flowered species (Armstrong & de Lange 2005). These plantings resulted from the movement of a limited amount of material from South Head, Hokianga, and as such these southerly populations lack sufficient genetic variability to sexually maintain themselves.

GENUS

Veronica

FAMILY

Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY

Veronica speciosa R.Cunn ex A.Cunn.

SYNONYMS

Hebe speciosa (A.Cunn.) Andersen, *Hebe speciosa* (A.Cunn.) Cockayne et Allan nom. superfl., nom. illeg.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Throughout the year.

FRUITING

Throughout the year.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from seed, cuttings and layered stem pieces. Cold sensitive and does best in an open, sunny, exposed place, in free draining soil. A spectacular plant ideal for a coastal property. Plants are rarely without flowers at any time of the year.

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'.

speciosa: Handsome

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: RR

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: RR

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NR 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

Armstrong TTJ, de Lange PJ. 2005. Conservation genetics of *Hebe speciosa* (Plantaginaceae) an endangered New Zealand shrub. *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 149: 229–239.

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Bayly MJ, Kellow AV. 2006. An illustrated guide to New Zealand Hebes. Te Papa Press, Wellington, NZ. 388 p.

Bodley FA. 1961. *Hebe speciosa* in the Marlborough Sounds. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 32: 9.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet by Peter J. de Lange 1 October 2006. Description based on Bayly & Kellow (2006).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/veronica-speciosa/>

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