Wahlenbergia congesta

COMMON NAME
Harebell

SYNONYMS
Wahlenbergia congesta (Cheeseman) N.E.Br. subsp. congesta, Wahlenbergia congesta subsp. haastii J.A.Petterson, Wahlenbergia morganii Petrie, Wahlenbergia saxicola var. congesta Cheeseman

FAMILY
Campanulaceae

AUTHORITY
Wahlenbergia congesta (Cheeseman) N.E.Brown

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE
WAHCON

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 36

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2018 | At Risk – Declining

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP
2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. South Island from the north-west Nelson coastline south to northern Fiordland and also along portions of the northern Foveaux Strait coastline.

HABITAT
Coastal on rocky bluffs, cliff faces, ledges, beaches (cobble and sand), sand dunes and in low turf overlying seepages. Usually found in the most exposed sites where constant wind and salt blast reduces competition from taller plants.
FEATURES
Compact, mat-forming, predominantly autogamous perennial herb producing numerous close-set rosetulate tufts of glossy glabrous, dark green to yellow-green leaves and subsessile white flowers. Petiole 1.5-2 mm, narrow, rather thin. Leaves 8-25 mm, dark green, yellow-green or reddish-green, orbicular, spatulate, margins shallowly crenate-serrate, undulate or flat, narrowed to petiole. Scape solitary arising from centre of each rosette, 10-20 mm long when flowering, elongating up to 50 mm long in fruit. Flowers solitary, terminal, erect, white or faintly tinged blue, 12-15 mm diameter. Calyx lobes 2 x 1 mm wide at base, triangular. Corolla 9-12 mm long, rotate-campanulate to funnelform, tube bowl-shaped, 4 x 5 mm, lobes 7-8 x 5 mm, ovate, obtuse. Capsule 3-6 mm diameter, globular. Seeds glossy brown, ellipsoid.

SIMILAR TAXA
None - the coastal habitat, compact, mat forming growth form, and small globose capsule readily distinguish W. congesta from the other rosetulate New Zealand species of the genus. Within W. congesta Petterson (1997) recognised two subspecies (subsp. congesta and subsp. haastii). Her subsp. haastii is said to differ from subsp. congesta by having smaller capsules (3 mm cf. up to 6 mm diameter in subsp. congesta) and funnelform rather than rotate-campanulate flowers. These are distinctions which on occasion can be seen in other populations that she had treated as subsp. congesta. Petterson (1997) also argued that there was an ecologically distinction, with subsp. haastii only growing on schist sand - however, this geological difference is only apparent because in the range where subsp. haastii happens to grow the beaches are made up primarily of the local rock type - schist. In cultivation the characters she used are soon lost, suggesting that irrespective of substrate there is no genetic or ecological basis to warrant this subspecies continued recognition.

FLOWERING
November - February

FLOWER COLOURS
Blue, White

FRUITING
December - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from rooted pieces - best kept in a pot and frequently repotted with fresh soil to keep it going. Use free draining soil mixed with plenty of sand. Does not like to dry out too much and does best in a sunny situation.

THREATS
A widespread at times locally common, biologically sparse and somewhat disjunct species. It is possible that some populations particularly those within dune fields are at risk, are declining or have gone extinct but there is as yet have no clear evidence for this.

ETYMOLOGY
wahlenbergia: Named in honour of Wahlenberg, a Swedish botanist and author of A Botany of Lapland.
congesta: Crowded

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available.

ATTRIBUTION
Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (22 October 2006). Description adapted from Petterson (1997).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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