

Wahlenbergia vernicosa

COMMON NAMES

coastal harebell, glossy harebell

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Radicant, biennial to short-lived perennial herb. Root branching, fleshy, brittle. Stems 0.1-1.5 m tall, fleshy and brittle in life, juveniles with opposite leaves, adult plants with mostly alternate sessile leaves, some stems and laterals with lower leaves opposite. Branches often closely divaricating, young shoots hairy, with crowded leaves. Leaves usually elliptic to oblanceolate, 10-40 × 5-10 mm, regularly and closely serrate, glabrous, bright green, fleshy and glossy as if varnished (in life), sparsely hairy, with prominent midrib below; sometimes linear, entire. Flowers in different populations may be white, pastel Lilac, or flax blue, on short slender pedicels 20-70 mm long. Corolla campanulate, 10-20 mm diam., 9-12 mm long, tube cylindrical (cup-shaped), 2 × 2 to 4 × 4 mm, lobes 5 × 4 to 8 × 5 mm, oblong, subacute, spreading; style protruding slightly from tube, slightly thickened in upper half, white. Stigmas 3 or 4, small. Calyx lobes glabrous, 3 × 1 to 4.0 × 1.5 mm, narrowly triangular, becoming radiate or recurved in fruit. Capsule glabrous, obconic, 6 × 4 to 10 × 5 mm, flat-topped or slightly concave at the top, valves flat until ripe. Self-fertile. Seeds 0.5 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from the other radiate New Zealand *Wahlenbergia* by the usually much larger size, glossy leaves, pale flax blue, pale lilac, or pure white campanulate flowers with a cup-shaped tube and spreading lobes, flat-topped or dish-topped obconic capsules with radiating or recurved calyx lobes (these appear somewhat twisted or curly in dried specimens), and unusual chromosome number ($2n = 54$ cf. $2n = 72$ in the other radicate species).

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Kermadec, Three Kings, North Island and Chatham Islands. Also eastern Australia, Tasmania, Norfolk Island, and possibly the Tongan Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal cliffs and islets, typically associated with seabird nesting sites, also volcanic and limestone outcrops both inland and near the sea.

GENUS

Wahlenbergia

FAMILY

Campanulaceae



In cultivation ex North Cape. Dec 1989.
Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Wahlenbergia vernicosa J.A.Petterson,

SYNONYMS

Wahlenbergia colensoi N.E.Br. pro. parte., Wahlenbergia littoricola subsp. vernicosa (J.A.Petterson) de Lange et E.K.Cameron

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October to May

FRUITING

November - June

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seeds are dispersed by ballistic projection and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Does best in a sunny situation in well drained soil. In suitable conditions it freely naturalises and can even become weedy.

ETYMOLOGY

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

vernicosa: Varnished

NVS CODE

WAHVER

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 54

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: CD, DPR, DPS, DPT, EF, NStr, PF 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

Petterson, J.A. 1997: Revision of the genus *Wahlenbergia* (Campanulaceae) in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 35: 9-54.

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 Prepared by P.J. de Lange 12 June 2007. Description adapted from Petterson (1997).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/wahlenbergia-vernicosa/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/wahlenbergia-vernicosa/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026