

# Lobelia physaloides

## COMMON NAMES

colensoa, koru

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Rare large soft herb with clusters of long tubular purple flowers inhabiting coastal forest of the northern North Island. Leaves large, soft, with many small teeth along margin. Flower base a green cup and on purple fuzzy stalks. Fruit a non-fleshy 10–15 mm wide blueish or white capsule.

## FLOWER COLOURS

Blue, Violet/Purple

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Densely branched shrub up to 1 × 1 m. Basal stems and rootstock woody.

**Branches and branchlets** erect to spreading, square in cross-section, green or purple, softly hairy. **Petioles** stout, fleshy, up to 100 mm long.

**Leaves** alternate, (50)–70–150–(200) × (30)–40–60–(100) mm, membranous, dark green to green, broad-ovate to ovate-oblong or elliptic oblong, apex acute to subacuminate, glabrescent, or finely hairy, with hairs concentrated on veins, leaf margins coarsely serrate.

**Inflorescences** terminal racemes, (5)–10–15–(20)-flowered. **Peduncles** pubescent. **Flowers** on slender, pubescent, pedicels 20 mm long; bracts linear. **Calyx lobes** 8 mm, narrow-triangular to filiform, ciliolate. **Corolla** pubescent, 30–50 mm long, violet, dark blue, or rarely white; lower lip 3-toothed, upper deeply 2-cleft. **Fruit** a subglobose berry, 10–15 mm diameter, blue, white with blue spots or streaks or white. **Seed** 0.6–0.9 mm, broadly elliptic, broadly obovate or circular, orange to orange-brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA

None

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island (from Te Pahi to about Whangarei and Trounson Kauri Forest, Poor Knights Islands, Hen Island / Taranga Island, Rakitu Island). Its remote presence on Rakitu Island off the eastern side of Great Barrier Island suggests that it was probably more widespread on the mainland than the current distribution suggests.

## HABITAT

Coastal and lowland forest. Often along stream sides, or in damp sites in half-shade. Formerly common in these types of habitats within the more northerly kauri (*Agathis australis*) forest remnants.

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, PD



Spirits Bay (November). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Spirits Bay (in November). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## THREATS

As a high palatable herb this species has virtually vanished from most of its former mainland habitat. It remains abundant on islands free of browsing animals (such as Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands and Poor Knights Islands). On the mainland, plants can be found in locations inaccessible to browsing animals, such as boulder falls and cliff faces and in any location where prolonged animal control or human traffic has reduced or limited the affect of these creatures. If animal browse is removed this species can make a spectacular recovery.

## DETAILED TAXONOMY

### FAMILY

Campanulaceae

### AUTHORITY

*Lobelia physaloides* A.Cunn.

### SYNONYMS

*Colensoa physaloides* (A.Cunn.) Hook.f.; *Pratia physaloides* (A.Cunn.) Hemsley

### TAXONOMIC NOTES

The generic position of this species has long been debated with various treatments accepting its placement in *Lobelia*, *Pratia* or the monotypic *Colensoa*. The most recent view advocated by Lammers (2011) is that this species is best treated as a *Lobelia*.

### ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

### ENDEMIC GENUS

No

### ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## ECOLOGY

### FLOWERING

May flower throughout the year. However plants are mostly found in flower between August and January

### FRUITING

Fruit may be present throughout the year. However, they are more common between November and March

### LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Fleshy berries are dispersed by invertebrate frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

### PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and cuttings. Very fast growing and ideal in semi-shaded to shaded spots under trees, especially along stream sides. An excellent pot plant.

## OTHER INFORMATION

### ETYMOLOGY

**lobelia:** Named after Lobel, pioneer botanist

**physaloides:** Like a cape gooseberry

### NVS CODE

LOBPHY

### CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 26

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: PD

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

2009 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: PD

2004 | Gradual Decline

## REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

### REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.

Lammers TG. 2011. Revision of the infrageneric classification of *Lobelia* L. (Campanulaceae: Lobelioideae). *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* 98(1): 37–62. <https://doi.org/10.3417/2007150>.

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 prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 August 2003. Description based on Allan (1961) .

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### NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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### MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lobelia-physaloides/>

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