Myosotis oreophila

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: Sp, DPT, EF
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Loosely tufted perennial herb. Rosette-leaves up to 40 × 10 mm, linear-spathulate, lamina tapering gradually into broad petiole of about the same length, tip obtuse, apiculate; hairs long, rather stiff, closely appressed, on upper surface almost touching mostly straight, some retrorse, on undersurface sparse, mostly all retrorse. Lateral branches few, ascending to erect, 70 mm or more long, leafy to cyme, internodes less than leaves. Stem-leaves c. 15 × 2 mm, linear-oblong, tip subacute; hairs on upper surface mostly long, stiff, appressed, on undersurface sparser and about half of them retrorse. Cymes simple, ebracteate, compact and c.20 mm long in fruit; internodes and pedicels very short. Calyx 6-9 mm long, lobes cut to less than half calyx length, narrow-oblong and subacute, hairs on lobes long and slightly flexuous, long ones towards base slightly hooked with underlayer of shorter appressed retrorse hairs. Corolla one-half longer than the calyx, funnelform, white, the lobes 5, spreading, and obtusely rounded. Stamens 5, very slightly exserted; filaments about equal in length to anthers; anthers large, shortly exserted, springing from the base of the corolla lobes; scales obscure. Style twice as long as calyx, slender. Nutlet 1.8-2.4 × 1.0-1.2 mm, ovate to ovate-elliptic or oblong-elliptic, black.

SIMILAR TAXA
Recognised by the stamen filaments which are about the same length as the anthers, rosette-leaves which are distnctly broader than the stem leaves, by the stiff, smoothly appressed hairs - and especially by the presence of retrorse hairs on the rosette-leaves (especially the abaxial surface). In the original description of the species the naming author Petrie noted that the flowers of M. oreophila were purple (see Allan 1961). However, all subsequent gatherings of this species have white flowers - and it seems likely that flower colour is an artifact of drying, it having been observed that some white-flowered myosoti (such as for example M. colensoi) on drying, over time change their flower colour to pale blue. This phenomena is also present in Wahlenbergia, and was it seems the basis for the white-flowered Geum divergens being described as having yellow flowers (New Zealand Geum flowers fade to yellow in herbarium conditions - often within months of drying). Whether this observation accounts for Petrie's account of a purple-flowered Myosotis oreophila remains to be tested. Irrespective to date no purple-flowered M. oreophila has yet been seen in the wild.

Myosotis oreophila. Photographer: Bec Stanley, Licence: CC BY-SA.

Myosotis oreophila. Photographer: Bec Stanley, Licence: CC BY-SA.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. South Island: Central Otago.

HABITAT
According to research by Rebecca Stanley Myosotis oreophila is now known from only one site where it is confined to c. 1.5 ha of fellfield (stony pavement of large and splintered blocks of schist) at 1590 m a.s.l. Here it grows with *Dracophyllum muscoides*, *Raoulia hectori* and a diverse array of lichens.

THREATS
This species faces no specific threats though the population is very small (covering an area of 1.5 ha) and in terms of density and size it fluctuates widely from year to year indicating that it is (like many *Myosotis taxa*) an opportunistic species responding quickly to favorable temperatures and conditions (R. J. Stanley pers. comm.). Not thought to be palatable to hares which are present within its habitat. Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) has been found in the general area but there is no evidence that it competes with *Myosotis oreophila*. *M. oreophila*, in common with many alpine myosoti has better seed set if plants are outcrossed, though it can still set good quality seed through selfing. It was originally described from plants gathered on Mt Ida where it has never been seen since.

GENUS
Myosotis

FAMILY
Boraginaceae

AUTHORITY
Myosotis oreophila Petrie

SYNONYMS
None (first described in 1896).

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December - January

FRUITING
January - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Unknown. Likely to be difficult. Probably best grown in an alpine house or rock garden

ETYMOLOGY
myosotis: Mouse-eared
oreophila: Mountain lover

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: EF, St, Sp
2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: EF, Sp, St
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: EF
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, NStr, RE, RR, St, TL Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange. Description based on Allan (1961).
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/myosotis-oreophila/

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25 August 2026