Wahlenbergia vernicosa

COMMON NAMES
coastal harebell, glossy harebell

BIOSTATUS
Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Radicate, 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

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
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available.
The Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Northland: 2026 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS DPT Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available.
The Northland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Northland | Taitokerau" Ford et al. 2026 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).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 August 2026