

Coprosma foetidissima

COMMON NAMES

hūpiro, stinkwood, shit shrub

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Shrub with pairs of thin pale green leaves that smell strongly of dung when crushed. Leaves 1-2cm long, veins not easily seen on the underside, widest at middle and gradually tapering to tip and base, small dark teeth between the bases of the leaf pairs. Fruits yellow or orange.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shrub or tree up to 3 m tall (can reach 6m occasionally). Open-branched with branches rather brittle. The bark is dark brown; branchlets are glabrous. Leaves are foetid (smelly) when bruised or crushed, and occur on slender narrowly winged petioles 8 - 15 mm. long. Stipules are truncate (see image), but produced into a usually conspicuous long denticle; ciliolate, with tufts of unequal hairs at tips. Lamina membranaceous to subcoriaceous, obovate to oblong to broadly ovate, obtuse, apiculate to mucronulate, 30-50 × 14-20 mm. Reticulations of veins evident, at least below. Flowers are solitary and terminal on branchlets. The drupe is pale to full orange, oblong and 7-10 mm and tastes horrible. long. For more information see full Flora description below.

SIMILAR TAXA

Stunted forms of *C. foetidissima* may be confused with *C. colensoi* but the former can be distinguished by the smell of rotten eggs which is given off when the leaves are crushed. Also the fruit is not flecked with darker red.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North, South, Stewart and Auckland Islands. Occurs from Moehau in North Island southwards.

HABITAT

Occurs in coastal to subalpine forest, shrubland and occasionally grasslands.

GENUS

Coprosma

FAMILY

Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coprosma foetidissima J.R.Forst. et G.Forst.



Kaitoke Ridge Track, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 09/05/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Stipule showing long denticle with subsidiary denticles. Te Marua, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

This is the type species of the genus *Coprosma* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October - November

FRUITING

March - July

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for November 2007](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

coprosma: From the Greek kopros 'dung' and osme 'smell', referring to the foul smell of the species, literally 'dung smell'

foetidissima: Vile smelling

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to Coprosma species of New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

COPFOE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 132

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. 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

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 for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coprosma-foetidissima/>

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