Veronica cockayneana

COMMON NAMES
hebe

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Low growing bushy shrub with many erect branches bearing pairs of dished oval leaves that are widest towards the tip and with a small knob at the tip inhabiting southwestern South Island mountains. Leaves 10-21.5mm long by 3.5-7.5mm wide. Leaf bud with small gap between base of leaves. Flowers white.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Densely branched, bushy shrub or spreading low shrub (in exposed situations) to 1.2 m tall. Branches erect; branchlets pubescent (with long, multicellular hairs, usually of 4 or more cells, golden or white), hairs bifarious; internodes 2.5-6.5 mm; leaf decurrencies obscure to evident and extended for length of internode. Leaf bud distinct; sinus narrow and acute. Leaves decussate or subdistichous, erecto-patent to patent; lamina usually elliptic (sometimes narrowly) or less commonly obovate, rigid or coriaceous, concave, (5-) 10-21.5 x (3-) 3.5-7.5 (-9) mm; apex subacute; margin minutely papillate and glabrous or minutely glandular-ciliate; upper surface green, glossy, with few or without evident stomata, glabrous or hairy along midrib (hairs to approximately 0.075 mm, many < 0.05 mm); lower surface glaucous (except on midrib or margin); petiole 0.5-2 mm. inflorescences with (2-) 6-16 (-23) flowers, lateral, unbranched (almost always) or with 3 or more branches, 1-3.2 cm; peduncle (0.15-) 0.2-1.1 cm; rachis 0.6-2.5 cm. Bracts usually opposite and decussate, free or connate (rarely and only very shortly), ovate or deltoid, subacute or acute or rarely obtuse. Flowers hermaphrodite or female (on different plants). Pedicels (0.5-) 1-5.5 mm. Calyx 1.5-4 mm, with anterior lobes free for most of their length or united ½-½-way to apex; lobes ovate, subacute or obtuse. Corolla tube glabrous; tube of hermaphrodite flowers 1.5-2.3 x approximately 1.8-2.5 mm, funnelform, shorter than or equalling calyx; tube of flowers 1-2 mm, shorter than or equalling calyx; lobes white at anthesis, ovate or elliptic, obtuse or subacute, suberect to patent, longer than corolla tube. Stamen filaments 1.4-4.3 mm (fertile 3.5-4.3 mm; sterile 1.4-1.8 mm); anthers magenta, 1.6-2 mm; sterile anthers 0.8-1 mm. Nectarial disc very broad and glabrous. Ovary 1.1-1.3 mm; ovules 9-13 per locule; style 2.5-5.2 mm; stigma noticeably larger in female flowers. Capsules subacute or obtuse, (2-) 3-5.5 x 2.2-3.3 mm, loculicidal split extending ½-¾-way to base (frequently less than ½-way). Seeds flattened, more or less broad ellipsoid, more or less smooth, brown (sometimes pale), 1.1-1.2 x 0.9-1.7 mm, micropylar rim 0.3-0.5 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Most similar to V. cryptomorpha and V. simulans neither of which occurs in Fiordland. Flavonoid and chromosome differences are important in separating the three species (Bayly et al. 2002). Morphological differences from V. simulans include: consistently entire leaf margins; leaf midribs that are glabrous or more finely pubescent above (hairs up to approximately 0.075 mm long); and mostly elliptic leaves. Morphological differences from H. cryptomorpha include mostly elliptic leaves that are generally broader in relation to their width, and smaller in terms of mean leaf length, length of the longest leaves, and the mean distance from a leaf base to its widest point. Similar species from southern South Island (also with an acute sinus in the leaf bud) are V. arganthera and V. dilatata. V. cockayneana is distinguished from the former by its darker anthers, usually smaller leaves, leaf margins that are glabrous or have minute glandular hairs, and leaves that are usually glossy above and glaucous below. This last feature, together with a bushier habit, usually also distinguishes it from V. dilatata (in which the leaves vary in glaucousness, but usually not strikingly between the upper and lower surfaces).

DISTRIBUTION
Southern South Island mountains, mostly on or west of the Main Divide, from Lake Sweeney and the Mataketake Range to near Centre Pass, north of Dusky Sound.

HABITAT
Alpine shrubland and grassland, sometimes in rocky places.

GENUS
Veronica

FAMILY
Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY
Veronica cockayneana Cheeseman

SYNONYMS
Veronica willcoxii Petrie, Hebe cockayneana (Cheeseman) Cockayne et Allan

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December -February (-March)

FRUITING
December - April

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY
veronica: Named after Saint Veronica, who gave Jesus her veil to wipe his brow as he carried the cross through Jerusalem, perhaps because the common name of this plant is ‘speedwell’. The name Veronica is often believed to derive from the Latin vera ‘truth’ and iconica ‘image’, but it is actually derived from the Macedonian name Berenice which means ‘bearer of victory’.
cockayneana: Named after Leonard Cockayne FRS (7 April 1855 - 8 July 1934) who is regarded as New Zealand’s greatest botanist and a founder of modern science in New Zealand

NVS CODE
VERCOC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 120

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 At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPR, Sp, NS, TL 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
Bayly, M. J., Kellow, A. V., Mitchell, K., Markham, K. R., de Lange, P. J., Harper, G. E., Garnock-Jones, P. J. and Brownsey, P. J. 2002 Descriptions and Flavonoid chemistry of new taxa in *Hebe* sect. *Subdistichae* (Scrophulariaceae). New *Zealand Journal of Botany* 40: 571-602.
Bayly, M.J., Kellow, A.V. 2006. An illustrated guide to New Zealand Hebes. Wellington, N.Z.: Te Papa press pg. 248.
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
Description adapted by M. Ward from Bayly & Kellow (2006).

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/veronica-cockayneana/

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07 June 2026