Veronica colensoi

COMMON NAMES
Hebe

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Low growing blue-green shrub bearing pairs of leaves which are m-shaped in cross section and have notches in the margin inhabiting rocky sites in south-central North Island. Leaves 14-27mm long by 4.5-9mm wide. Leaf bud with long narrow gap between leaves at base. Flower spike to 4.5cm long.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

Locally common on riverside cliff faces, Kaweka. Photographer: Marley Ford, Date taken: 15/07/2020, Licence: CC BY.

Locally common on riverside cliff faces, Kaweka. Photographer: Marley Ford, Date taken: 10/07/2020, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Openly branched, small bushy shrub or spreading low shrub to 0.4 (-0.75) m tall. Branches erect, old stems brown or grey; branchlets initially green, becoming brown, glabrous or, very sparsely puberulent, hairs bifarious; internodes (1.5-) 2-5 (-8) mm; leaf decurrencies evident. Leaf bud distinct, tetragonous in transverse section; sinus narrow and acute. Leaves decussate or subdistichous, erecto-patent; lamina obovate or elliptic (narrowly to broadly), coriaceous, shallowly m-shaped in transverse section (the margins being slightly revolute) or flat, (10-) 14-27 (-42) x (2-) 4.5-9 (-15.5) mm; apex subacute or obtuse; margin sometimes very narrowly cartilaginous, glabrous and minutely papillate (to the inside of outer cartilaginous portion), entire or shallowly toothed (may vary on one plant); upper surface glaucous (often less so than lower surface), with many stomata, glabrous or hairy along midrib; lower surface glaucous; petiole glabrous or hairy above. Inflorescences with (11-) 15-21 (-29) flowers, lateral and sometimes also terminal, tripartite and/or unbranched, only sometimes with more than three branches, (1,7-) 2.5-4.5 cm; peduncle 0.5-1.3 cm, glabrous (usually) or hairy: rachis (1.2-) 1.9-3.3 cm. Bracts alternate (lowermost pair may be subopposite or opposite), lanceolate or deltoid or oblong, acute or subacute, margins glabrous (usually) or hairy (very rarely, and only with a few cilia near base). Flowers hermaphrodite or female (on different plants). Pedicels longer than or equal to bracts, 0.5-2 (-3) mm. Calyx (1.5-) 2-2.5 (-3) mm, 4-5-lobed (5th lobe small, posterior), with anterior lobes free for most of their length or united to 1/3 – 2/3- way to apex; lobes deltoid or lanceolate, acute or subacute, margins glabrous (usually) or eglandular ciliolate (only ever with sparse, short hairs). Corolla tube glabrous; tube of hermaphrodite flowers 1.8-2.3 x 1-1.5 mm, funnelform, shorter than (mostly) or equalling calyx; lobes white at anthesis, lanceolate or ovate, subacute or obtuse, patent to recurved, longer than corolla tube. Stamen filaments 2-3.5 mm; anthers yellow or buff or pink or mauve or ,violet, 1.2-1.9 mm. Ovary ovoid (sometimes very narrowly), 0.8-1.3 mm; ovule, 4-8 per locule: style 2.2-4.5 mm. Capsules subacute, (2.5-) 2.8-3.5 (-3.8) x 1.9-2.5 mm, loculicidal split extending 1/4-1/2-way to base. Seeds flattened, more or less ellipsoid-oblong, more or less smooth, pale brown (with orange component), 1.1-1.5 x 0.7-0.9 mm, micropylar rim 0.2-0.3 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from most species by the combination of: low-growing, rupestral habit; leaf bud sinus; leaves glaucous on both surfaces, m-shaped in transverse section; and corolla tubes shorter than or equal to calyces. It is most similar to Veronica scopulorum, differing by the upper surface of the leaves being hairy along the midrib, whereas V. colensoi leaves upper surface is glaucous. Calyces without marginal cilia (the usual condition in V. colensoi) are almost unique in the genus, being otherwise seen only on some specimens of V. pareora and V. macrocalyx.

DISTRIBUTION

Central North Island - in the upper catchments of the Moawhango, Mohaka, Rangitikei, Taruarau and Ngaruroro rivers.

HABITAT

Grows on rock outcrops on bluffs, gorges and riverbanks.

GENUS

Veronica

FAMILY

Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY

Veronica colensoi Hook.f.

SYNONYMS

Hebe colensoi (Hook.f.) Cockayne, Veronica hillii (Colenso), Hebe hillii (Colenso) A.Wall, Hebe colensoi var. hillii (Colenso) L.B.Moore

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Elder (1939, 1971) presented a study of variation in *V. colensoi,* and Moore (in Allan 1961) recognized two varieties, distinguished on the basis of leaf size, leaf shape and the number of teeth on the leaf margin. There is substantial variation in these features, no doubt representing both environmental and genetic difference, (perhaps likely between small, isolated populations), but strong grounds for distinguishing two distinct biological entitles are lacking, and no varieties are recognised here. Some populations include mixtures of plants representing each of Moore's varieties, and Elder (1939) suggested that many plants are of intermediate form (i.e. between what he called "jordanon 1" and "jordanon 2").

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
(August-) September-November (-January)

FRUITING
December-April (-October)

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'.
colensoi: Named after William Colenso (7 November 1811 - 10 February 1899) who was a Cornish Christian missionary to New Zealand, and also a printer, botanist, explorer and politician.

NVS CODE
VERCOL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Allan, H. H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 1.Wellington: Government Printer.
Bayly, M.J., Kellow, A.V. 2006. An illustrated guide to New Zealand Hebes. Wellington, N.Z.: Te Papa press pg. 240.
Elder, N. L. 1939. The glaucous *Hebe* of the Inland Patea. *Veronica colensoi, V. hillii* and *V. darwiniana*. Transactions of the Royal Society of New Zen/and 69: 373-7.
Elder, N. L. 1971. The glaucous hebe of the Inland Patea: a footnote. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin 37:64.
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-colensoi/

PDF DATE

07 June 2026