Veronica topiaria

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Bushy very rounded shrub bearing pairs of blueish-green small oval leaves inhabiting northern South Island mountains. Leaves 8-21mm long by 3.5-8mm wide, u-shaped in cross section, tapering to tip and base. Leaf bud without gap at base. Flowers white, in spikes to 4cm long towards tip of twigs.

Cobb valley, November. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Cobb valley, November. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Bushy shrub (often of neat, rounded habit) to 1.2 m tall. Branches erect, old Stems brown or grey (mottled); branchlets green or red-brown or brown or black (when dry), pubescent (mostly with coarse white-golden hairs that are often upward-facing), hairs usually bifarious or rarely uniform; internodes (1-) 2- 6 (-10) mm; leaf decurrencies evident. Leaf bud distinct; sinus absent. Leaves erect to erecto-patent; lamina elliptic or obovate, concave, (5-) 8-21 (-23) x (3-) 3.5-8 mm; apex obtuse to acute or apiculate; 2 lateral secondary veins sometimes evident at base of fresh leaves; margin usually minutely papillate (on lower surface, especially toward apex) and rarely ciliolate; upper surface glaucous or glaucescent, dull or slightly glossy, with many stomata, usually hairy along midrib and rarely covered with minute glandular hairs; lower surface glaucous. Inflorescences with 9-33 flowers, lateral, unbranched, 1-3 (-4) cm; peduncle 0.2-0.8 (-1.1) cm; rachis 0.6-2.4 (-3.2) cm. Bracts alternate (but often with an opposite basal pair), deltoid (sometimes narrowly) or elliptic (basal bracts often larger, lanceolate to elliptic), acute lo obtuse. Flowers hermaphrodite or female (on different plants). Pedicels 0.5-2.5 mm. Calyx 1.5-2.8 mm; lobes elliptic or ovate, obtuse to acute. Corolla tube hairy inside; tube of hermaphrodite flowers 1.5-2.5 mm, longer than calyx; tube of female flowers approximately 2 mm, longer than calyx (but sometimes barely); lobes white at anthesis, elliptic (often broadly) or circular, obtuse, suberect to recurved, approximately equalling corolla tube. Stamen filaments incurved at apex in bud, 2.5-4.5 mm; anthers magenta, 1.25-1.5 mm. Ovary 1.2-1.5 mm; ovules approximately 12-14 per locule; style 3.5-6.5 mm. Capsules subacute, 4-5 x 2.5-3.5 mm, loculicidal split extending less than ¼-way lo base. Seeds flattened (sometimes strongly), more or less ellipsoid to discoid or irregular, not winged or only weakly winged, brown, 1.2-2 x 0.9-1.3 (-1.8) mm, micropylar rim 0.2-0.5 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
The combination of usually glaucous leaves and compact habit distinguishes *V. topiaria* from most other species of small-leaved “Occlusae” (see Bayly & Kellow, 2006). Its leaves can be similar to those of *V. glaucophylla*, from which it is distinguished in having glabrous ovaries, and corolla tubes that are always longer than calyces.

DISTRIBUTION
Northern South Island, from near Boulder Lake in the northwest to Amuri Pass and the Poplars Range in the south, and as far east as the Richmond Range.

HABITAT
It grows in shrubland and tussock grassland above the treeline. It can be one of the dominant species in some shrubland associations.

GENUS
Veronica

FAMILY
Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY
Veronica topiaria (L.B.Moore) Garn.-Jones

SYNONYMS
Hebe topiaria L.B.Moore

TAXONOMIC NOTES
The species shows considerable variation in the shape and size of the leaves. Leaves range from approximately 8 x 4 mm to approximately 22 x 6 mm, from narrowly to broadly elliptic or obovate, and with apices that are rounded to acute.
The four easternmost and somewhat disjunct collections represented on the distribution map (see Bayly & Kellow, 2006) are from Mt Richmond (CHR 286388), Mt Starveall (CHR 76140), Motueka River Left Branch (CHR 401652) and the Red Hills (CHR 387478). Some of these specimens are sterile and/or difficult to identify with certainty, but they have most of the critical features of *V. topiaria*. Since some of these areas (e.g. Mt Richmond) have been intensively botanised, the relative paucity of collections might suggest that *V. topiaria* is not as plentiful or conspicuous in these areas as it is in wetter mountains to the west and south.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
(December-) January-February (-April)

FRUITING
February-May

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’.
topiaria: Refers to the compact, globular habit of this shrub, with the appearance of topiary.

NVS CODE
VERTOP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 122

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Bayly M. and Kellow A. (2006). An Illustrated Guide to New Zealand Hebes.Te Papa Press: Wellington
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-topiaria/

PDF DATE

08 June 2026