

Ipomoea cairica

COMMON NAMES

pouwhiwhi, coastal morning glory, railway creeper

BIOSTATUS

Native

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial rhizomatous vine. Stems cable like, usually glabrous (rarely minutely pubescent), initially \pm smooth and reddish green to purple but maturing grey with the surface becoming conspicuously tuberculate. Leaves with petioles 20–60 mm long, usually falsely stipulate; lamina 30–100 mm long, palmately divided almost to base, ovate to orbicular in outline, 5–7-lobed, lobes lanceolate to elliptic or obovate with outermost lobes sometimes unequally 2-lobed, acute to obtuse, mucronulate. Inflorescences axillary, 1-several-flowered; peduncle 10–80 mm long; pedicels 10–30 mm long. Sepals 4.5–6.0 mm long, ovate, with outer sepals slightly shorter, obtuse to acute, mucronulate, glabrous. Corolla funneliform, purple, reddish-purple or white. Stamens and style included. Capsule c.10 mm long, \pm globose. Seeds c.0.5 mm long, subglobose to ovoid, densely, shortly tomentose.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from the other *Ipomoea* indigenous to or naturalised in New Zealand by the palmately divided leaves.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Kermadec (Raoul, Macauley, Cheeseman Islands), Three Kings, North and Great Barrier Islands. Mostly local and the exact southern are now unclear due to this species cultivation well south of apparently indigenous populations, and the subsequently naturalisation from these plantings via garden waste and (sometimes) deliberate plantings. The most likely natural southern limit is the Waitemata Harbour though most literature regards Tiritirimatangi Island as the actual southern limit. Also widespread in Africa, Asia, Australia, western Central America and in many of the Pacific islands of Oceania on some of which it may be naturalised.

HABITAT

Coastal. A local to sometimes abundant vine of dune systems, coastal scrub and cliff face vegetation, rubble slopes and mangrove (*Avicennia marina* subsp. *australasica*). Also an occasional urban weed found in waste land, rubbish dumps, car yards and hedges.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

DETAILED TAXONOMY



Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 09/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 09/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.

FAMILY

Convolvulaceae

AUTHORITY

Ipomoea cairica (L.) Sweet

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

September - July

FRUITING

September - August

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seeds are dispersed by wind and water (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very easy from cuttings, rooted pieces and fresh seed. Inclined to become very aggressive and weedy, so is rarely cultivated. It makes an excellent sand binder and will tolerate extremes of habitat, though it is frost sensitive. In cooler areas it may die back to its root stock if frosted, only to resprout when local conditions warm.

OTHER INFORMATION

CULTIVATION

Occasionally offered by specialist native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

ipomoea: Worm-like, referring to coiled flower bud

cairica: Of or from Cairo (Egypt)

NVS CODE

IPOCAI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 30$

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: SO Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland](#)" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Green, P.S. 1994: Flora of Australia Volume 49, Oceanic Islands 1. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service

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 for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (9 November 2011). Description adapted from Green (1994)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ipomoea-cairica/>

PDF DATE

02 August 2025