

Coprosma brunnea

COMMON NAME

coprosma

SYNONYMS

Coprosma acerosa f. *brunnea* Kirk

FAMILY

Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coprosma brunnea (Kirk) Cockayne ex Cheeseman

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

COPBRU

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 44

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Data Deficient

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Sprawling yellowish small-leaved shrub inhabiting inland open rocky areas. Twigs pale orange, slightly fuzzy at tip. Leaves narrow, small, with dark line down middle on the underside, in clusters of pairs scattered along twigs. Flowers tiny, with long protruding threads. Fruit streaked purple.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura. Nelson and the drier regions of central and eastern South Island.

HABITAT

Lowland to alpine. To 1500 m. Often common on stony riverbeds and terraces but also in subalpine scrub and occasionally on open rocky sites in tussock-herbfield.



Hooker valley, December. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Hooker valley, December. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Prostrate to sprawling with slender flexible interlacing branches and branchlets forming flattened usually rather open wiry mats up to approximately 2 m across, occasionally reaching 1 m or more in height when in scrub.

Branches with dark brown bark, branchlets pubescent. **Stipules** broadly triangular, obtuse, pubescent, ciliate.

Leaves sparse, in opposite pairs or fascicles on very short petioles; lamina coriaceous, dark brownish green, glabrous, linear, obtuse, 5–8–(13) × 0.5–1 mm; midrib alone evident. **Flowers** solitary, terminal on short leafy branchlets; male flower with calyx vestigial or non-existent, corolla broadly campanulate, lobes acute, more or less equal to tube; female flower with calyx minutely toothed, corolla tubular, lobes acute, more or less equal to tube.

Drupe translucent pale blue or with pale blue flecks, globose, 5–6 mm diameter.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to *Coprosma* species of New Zealand

SIMILAR TAXA

Coprosma acerosa grows in different habitats (*C. acerosa* prefers coastal sands throughout its distribution) and the two species are not thought to overlap naturally. *C. acerosa* is generally a more compact growth form with more leaves present.

Coprosma intertexta is bushy but not stiffly erect; the leaves are sharp-tipped in outline and usually red-margined.

FLOWERING

September–December

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

FRUITING

February–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed, semi-hardwood cuttings and rooted pieces. Prefers free draining soil in a sunny position.

Most nursery stock sold over the last few decades as this species is not *C. brunnea* but an allied segregate of *C. acerosa* endemic to the Central Volcanic Plateau of the North Island.

THREATS

Coprosma brunnea is now uncommon over large parts of its range—it is often heavily browsed by rabbits and hares and its habitat is modified by gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and broom (*Cytisus scoparius*).

ETYMOLOGY

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

brunnea: From the Latin brunneus 'deep brown'

WHERE TO BUY

Occasionally offered by retail plant and specialist native plant nurseries.

NOTES ON TAXONOMY

Coprosma brunnea is part of the *C. acerosa* A.Cunn. complex, and many botanists prefer to regard it as either *C. acerosa* or a form of it. However, *C. brunnea* has been found growing sympatrically with *C. acerosa*, and remaining distinct from it, while nrDNA ITS and ETS sequences show that *C. acerosa* is a complex aggregate of at least 6 lineages (*C. brunnea* is one of these), and there are subtle morphological characters to support these lineages. Therefore, until further research is conducted into this problem NZPCN think it better to retain *C. brunnea* at the rank of species.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by M. Ward from Allan (1961), Mark (2012), and Wilson & Galloway (1993).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
- Mark A F. 2021. Above the Treeline: A Nature Guide to Alpine New Zealand, 2nd edition. Pottton Burton, Nelson, NZ. 433 p.
- Wilson HD, Galloway T. 1993. Small-leaved shrubs of New Zealand. Manuka Press, Christchurch, NZ. 305 p.

MORE INFORMATION

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