

**HEBE LEIOPHYLLA - A NEW SOUTHERN DISTRIBUTIONAL LIMIT****Miles Giller & Alastair Macdonald**

*Hebe leiophylla* (Fig. 1) lives in scrub and forest margins and on the edges of tracks, clearings and streams. It can occur on both well-drained and swampy soils, from the coast to the tree-line. Its recorded distribution is confined to the northern South Island, where it is widespread as far south as the southern end of the Paparoa Range near Greymouth in the west, and as far south as the Organ Range just south of Hanmer Springs in the east (Bayly & Kellow 2006). On the eastern side of the Southern Alps it has been recorded from lowland podocarp-hardwood forest to montane mountain beech forest.



**Figure 1** *Hebe leiophylla*, Heaphy Track, near Kohaihai Bluff.

*Hebe leiophylla* was formerly known as *Hebe gracillima*, though some authorities now treat it as *Veronica leiophylla*.

*Hebe leiophylla* generally grows as a bushy shrub up to 3 m tall. The brown branchlets are fully hairy. It has a very small purple band where the leaf joins the stem, which will often come off with the leaf if the leaf is plucked off. The leaf and leaf stem edges are hairy and the small rounded sinus in the leaf bud is surrounded by hairs. The leaves vary in dimensions from 15 mm x 4 mm to 40 mm x 8 mm. They are generally widest below the mid-point and there are usually two lateral veins in the leaf running from the leaf base up the leaf to about a third the leaf length. The leaves have a very short stem. The inflorescences are lateral, about 160 mm long, and contain some 150 white flowers.

Plant distribution maps give us a good idea of where various species occur. However, they are rarely definitive, as many parts of the country have not necessarily been thoroughly botanised and some information is not available on public record. *Hebe leiophylla* has recently been recorded growing alongside a walking track at the Grey River picnic area, on DoC-administered land on the southern flanks of Mount Grey, North Canterbury. This site is some 60 km south of the Organ Range, thus represents a considerable extension of the species' southern distributional limit. Six plants were located, though there is clearly scope for others to be found. The Mount Grey plants occur as both understorey shrubs under significant shading, and along riparian and track margins in relatively open sites. One specimen growing in an open riverbank site was very bushy and carried numerous old seed heads. Most other plants were relatively gangly and only carried a few seed heads. Representative material has been collected and will be lodged at the Allan Herbarium.

Canterbury Botanical Society field days offer an excellent opportunity to unearth surprising new locations for some species. Provided specimens are officially determined and lodged at herbaria these discoveries can provide a greater appreciation of the distribution of each species, which can in turn lead to their more appropriate conservation.

## References

Bayly M, Kellow A 2006. An illustrated guide to New Zealand hebes. Wellington, Te Papa Press.