

Tonella tenella – Small-flowered Tonella

English name: Small-flowered Tonella

Other English name: Lesser Baby Innocence

Scientific name: *Tonella tenella* (Benth. ex A. DC.) A. Heller

Other scientific name: *Collinsia tenella* Benth. ex A. DC.

Family: *Plantaginaceae* (Plantain Family)

Risk status

BC: vulnerable (S3); blue-listed

Canada: Endangered

Global: secure (G5)

Elsewhere: Washington, Oregon, California not ranked (SNR)

Range/Known distribution: In Canada, Small-flowered Tonella has been reported from four locations, three of which are recently confirmed and a fourth (from Mount Tzouhalem) which is mentioned in the Flora North America treatment with no other details. A juvenile plant was reported from the southwest slopes of Mount Tzouhalem in March 2024 and requires confirmation.

In the United States, Small-flowered Tonella ranges from south Puget Sound and the Columbia River Gorge, south through the Willamette Valley to the Coast and Cascade Ranges to the San Francisco basin, and in the Sierra Nevada.

Field description: Small-flowered Tonella is a slender, delicate annual with ascending, or sometimes erect and often branching hairless stems up to 25 cm long. Its leaves are opposite. The toothed lower leaves are oval or rounded with long stalks, the middle leaves are deeply three lobed with progressively shorter stalks, and the uppermost leaves are small, stalkless, and usually lack lobes. The leaves are hairless or shaggy-hairy above and hairless below.

Its flowers are arranged in a minutely glandular-pubescent raceme with lanceolate bracts at the base of each of the long-stalked flowers. The calyx is fused at its base, with spreading lobes. The corolla is 2.0 – 2.5 mm long and 2-4 mm wide and consists of an upper lip with 2 lobes and a larger



Distribution of *Tonella tenella*
● Confirmed Sites

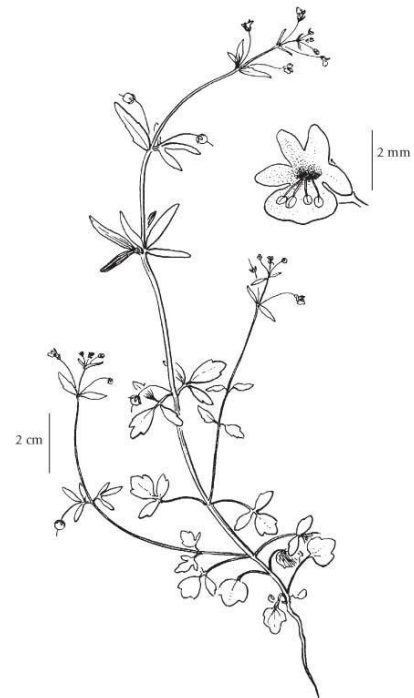
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lower lip with three lobes. The lobes are white at the base and blue at the tip. There are four stamens, which extend beyond the corolla, and a single style. The fruits are dry, egg-shaped capsules, 2.0-2.5 mm long. Each capsule usually contains 2 seeds.

Identification tips: Within its range in Canada, Small-flowered Tonella is unlikely to be confused with anything apart from Small-flowered Blue-eyed Mary, another small annual with blue, 2-lipped flowers. The upper lip of Blue-eyed Mary flowers is bent backwards, and the middle lobe of the lower lip is the smallest. None of Blue-eyed Mary's leaves are three-parted. The upper lip of Small-flowered Tonella flowers is not bent backwards and the middle lobe of the lower lip is the largest.



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Life history: Small-flowered Tonella relies exclusively on seeds for reproduction. Seeds germinate in March or April and the plants usually flower in late April or May. Plants may self-pollinate or be cross-pollinated by insects. Plants die back in June or early July, as the summer drought deepens.

Habitat: Small-flowered Tonella is found in woodlands and open forests with a canopy of Arbutus (*Arbutus menziesii*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), and Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), or in meadow openings with them. The moss layer is often well-developed, with Oregon Beaked Moss (*Kindbergia oregana*), Shaggy Gooseneck Moss (*Hylocomiadelphus triquetrus*), Broom Moss (*Dicranum scoparium*), and Curly Plait Moss (*Stereodon subimponens*). The native forb layer is composed primarily of sparse low-growing perennials such as Field Chickweed (*Cerastium arvense*), Small-leaved Montia (*Montia parvifolia*), Yerba Buena (*Clinopodium douglasii*), Hairy Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*), and Small-flowered Alumroot (*Heuchera micrantha*), as well as

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a diverse assemblage of low annuals including Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia parvifolia*), Few-flowered Clover (*Trifolium oliganthum*), Sea Blush (*Plectritis congesta*), Chickweed Monkey-flower (*Erythranthe alsinoides*), Miner's-lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*), Woodland Tarweed (*Anisocarpus madioides*), and Vari-leaved Collomia (*Collomia heterophylla*). There may be a sparse cover of native grasses including Western Fescue (*Festuca occidentalis*), Blue Wildrye (*Elymus glaucus*), Harford's Melic (*Melica harfordii*), and Columbia Brome (*Bromus vulgaris*). In Canada, Small-flowered Tonella can be found at elevations up to 350 m.

Why this species is at risk: In the past, development may have been the greatest threat to Small-flowered Tonella. The remaining populations occur in areas where development is very unlikely.

The greatest contemporary threat comes from invasive herbaceous plants, including Common Vetch* (*Vicia sativa*), Bull Thistle* (*Cirsium vulgare*), Foxglove* (*Digitalis purpurea*), Cleavers* (*Galium aparine*), Barren Brome* (*Bromus sterilis*), Wall-lettuce* (*Mycelis muralis*), Upright Hedge-parsley* (*Torilis japonica*), Hairy Bittercress* (*Cardamine hirsuta*), Wall Speedwell* (*Veronica arvensis*), and Common Forget-me-not* (*Myosotis discolor*).

Some populations are at risk from trampling by people and mountain bikers.

What you can do to help this species: Known occurrences should be monitored to ensure that threats remain low. Populations of some invasive species can be controlled before they become abundant.

References

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For further information, contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the web site at: www.goert.ca

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