Acaena fissistipula

COMMON NAMES
bidibid, piripiri

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
An evergreen hairy silvery-blue herb, which spreads up to a 1 metre across and up to 5 cm in height. The pinnate leaves are delicate and toothed, and may have a pinkish, contrasting coloured margin. The globe shaped flower balls are red and grow into a cluster of hooked spikes, which when ripe brown off, become firm and may stick to your socks or laces when brushed past in order to disperse.

Mt Patriarch, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Alan's Basin, Broken River, Craigieburn Range. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 22/02/2020, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Stoloniferous, prostrate, trailing perennial herb, forming a loose mat up to 1 metre in diameter. **Stems** less than 1-1.5 mm diameter, hairy, up to 30 cm long, and/or 5 cm high, rooting at nodes; **Stipules** trifid, quadrifid or pentafid, deeply incised; **Leaves** odd-pinnate, between 25-150 mm long with 7-9(-11) leaflets; **Leaflets** orbicular, serrated toothed margin, teeth rounded, 9-13 hair-tipped teeth per leaflet, lower leaflets smaller, distinctly dull grey-green on upper surface often with brown to light-brown coloured teeth more or less glabrous veins may be obvious, lower surface sparsely hairy; **Inflorescence scape** 120-200 mm, brownish stem almost glabrous; **Capitulum** of 50-60 florets, each floret has 4 sepals, 2 stamen, red anthers, 1 white or rose coloured style, 1 achene; **Fruit** roughly cone-shaped, each having 4 barb-tipped spines, up to 4mm long, mature dry, pale brown when ripe, enabling attachment to passing hairy/feathered surfaces as vector.

SIMILAR TAXA
Acaena caesiiglauca, another colourful species more blue-green than grey-green, stipules are perfect or bifid rather than 3-5-fid; leaflet teeth are sharply pointed rather than rounded; flower stems are hairy compared to almost hairless; anthers are white rather than red.
Acaena dumicola, is very similar in appearance at first glance. The differences between the two species are that the 3 distal leaflets of this species are orbicular then those below being dramatically reduced in size and shape reduce, compared to *A. fissistipula* which reduce evenly from distal to proximal; , compared to the; the anthers of *A. dumicola* are white compared to red/maroon in *A. fissistipula*. The scape is up to 10 cm in *A. dumicola* compared to up to 12-20 cm in *A. fissistipula*.
Acaena inermis, glaucous or dull purple-brown in colour, rhizomatous rather than stoloniferous; stipules entire only; up to 15 leaflets; lack hairy tip; scape up to 75 mm, rather than up to 200 mm; only 20 florets at most per capitulum; fruit spikes red, lacking barbs or hairs.
Acaena tesca, also glaucous in colour, rhizomatous rather than stoloniferous; capitulum lacking scape, rather than up to 200mm; spines of fruit up to 20 mm long rather than up to 4 mm, and red; confined to central Otago.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. **South Island**, widespread.

HABITAT
Montane to low alpine, (300-1500 m.a.s.l.), moist open sites herbfield and tussock grasslands.

GENUS
Acaena

FAMILY
Rosaceae

AUTHORITY
Acaena fissistipula Bitter

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November-March

FRUITING
December-March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Spiny hypanthia are dispersed by attaching to fur, feathers and clothing and possibly also dispersed by wind and granivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
acaena: From the Greek ‘akanthos’ thorn, referring to the spiny calyx that many species have
fissistipula: From the Latin fissus ‘split’ and stipula ‘stipule’

NVS CODE
ACAFIS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 42

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: TL Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025” Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 1. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledons. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. pg.358-359.
Lloyd K. 2001. A Key and notes for *Acaena* (Rosaceae) in New Zealand. Botanical Society of Otago Newsletter 25. Pgs.10-14.
Mark AF. 2012. Above the Treeline: A Nature Guide to Alpine New Zealand. Craig Potton Publishing, Nelson. pg.113.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by MD Ward (August 29th 2025). Description adapted from Mark (2012), Lloyd (2001), Allan (1961).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/acaena-fissistipula/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026