Acaena microphylla var. microphylla

COMMON NAMES
bidibid, piripiri

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
An evergreen shiny green and or bronze herb, which forms a dense mat spreading up to ½ a metre across and about 2 cm in height. The plant is in general a small species of the genus. Found in the central North Island in unconsolidated substrates like river gravels. The pinnate leaves are sharply toothed and have tiny hairs on the tips. The globe shaped flower balls are white, on short stems then grow into a cluster of red non-barbed spikes, which when ripe brown off.

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

Rare on river terrace in gravel, Kaimanawa. Photographer: Marley Ford, Date taken: 25/03/2024, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizomatous, prostrate, trailing perennial herb, forming a mat up to 0.5 metres in diameter. **Stems** 1 mm diameter, up to 25 cm long, and/or 2 cm high, rooting at nodes; **Stipules** entire; **Leaves** odd-pinnate, between 5-30 mm long with 9-15 leaflets; **Leaflets** orbicular 1.5-4 × 1.5-4 mm, serrated blunt-toothed margin, 5-7 teeth minutely hair-tipped, lower leaflets gradually reduce in size, green or bronze shiny upper surface obvious veins, lower surface paler and sparsely hairy; **Inflorescence scape** 7-25 mm, bearing shaggy hairs; **Capitulum** about 5 mm diameter when flowering, composed of up to 20 florets, each floret has 4 sepals, 2 stamen, white anthers, 2 white styles, 2 achenes; **Fruit** roughly cone-shaped, each having 4 pink or crimson pointed barbless spines (occasionally no spines), up to 15 mm long, which mature dry, brown or golden brown when ripe.

SIMILAR TAXA
Acaena microphylla var. pauciglochidiata is very similar with a couple of differences, the capitula is stalkless compared to a scape of 7-25 mm in *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla*; also, the capitula has less florets 2-4, whereas *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla* has up to 20; the fruit spines are tipped with a few hairs compared to bald in *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla*.
Acaena anserinifolia a very close relative, at a glance is similar to both of the *A. microphylla* varieties, it does however have larger proportions in numerous aspects. The leaves can reach 75 mm in length, it has more florets than both species 50-60, a longer scape than both species 40-120 mm, and barbed spines.
Acaena rorida is similar to both of the *A. microphylla* varieties. Growing in only one area its range does not overlap with the nearest *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla*. *Acaena microphylla* has smaller, shiny green or bronze leaves; scapes are shorter 6-15 mm compared to up to 25 mm long in *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla*. The capitula has up to 10 florets, whereas *A. microphylla* var. *microphylla* has up to 20 florets.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Central **North Island**.

HABITAT
Montane to low alpine (500-1300 m.a.s.l.), grassland, river terraces.

GENUS
Acaena

FAMILY
Rosaceae

AUTHORITY
Acaena microphylla Hook.f. var. microphylla

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November-January.

FRUITING
January-April.

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)

ETYMOLOGY
acaena: From the Greek ‘akanthos’ thorn, referring to the spiny calyx that many species have
microphylla: Small leaf

NVS CODE
ACAMVC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.42

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 1. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. pg. 357.
Hooker JD. 1853 The Botany of the Antarctic Voyage of H.M. Discovery Ships Erebus and Terror in the Years 1839–1843, under the command of Captain Sir James Clark Ross. II. Flora Novae-Zelandiae. Part I. Flowering plants. Lovell Reeve, London. Pg. 55.
Lee WG, Macmillan BH, Partridge TR, Lister R, Lloyd KM. 2001. Fruit features in relation to the ecology and distribution of *Acaena* (Rosaceae) species in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology*. 25(1): pp.17-27.
Macmillan BH. 1991. *Acaena rorida* and *Acaena tesca* (Rosaceae)—two new species from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, 29(2): pp.131-138.
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 28th 2025). Description adapted from Lloyd (2001), Allan (1961), Hooker (1853).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

27 May 2026