Acaena novae-zelandiae

COMMON NAMES
red bidibid

BIOSTATUS
Native

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 or dull bright green herb, which spreads up to 1.5 metres across and about 15cm in height. Found all over New Zealand in varied habitats. The pinnate leaves are sharply toothed and have hairs on the tips. The globe shaped flower balls are white, then grow into a cluster of red hooked spikes, which when ripe brown off, become firm and may stick to your socks or laces when brushed past in order to disperse.



Karitane Peninsula, Otago. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Karitane Peninsula, Otago. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Stoloniferous, prostrate, trailing perennial herb, forming a loose mat up to 1.5 metres in diameter. **Stems** 1.5-2 mm diameter, hairy, up to 1 metre long, and/or 15 cm high, rooting at nodes; **Stipules** entire to pentafid; **Leaves** odd-pinnate, rachis often red, between 20-110 mm long with 9-15 leaflets; **Leaflets** oblong to elliptical 4-17 × 2-10 mm, serrated toothed margin, 8-15 teeth hair-tipped, terminal leaflet 9-12 mm long, lower leaflets are smaller, upper surface shiny (especially new growth) slightly channelled glabrous bright green to dull green (depending on age) veins obvious, lower surface pale green hairy along veins; **Inflorescence scape** 100-150 mm, finely hairy; **Capitulum** about 9 mm diameter when flowering, composed of 80-120 florets, each floret has 4 sepals, 2 (rarely 3) stamen, white anthers, 1 style, 1 achene; **Fruit** roughly cone-shaped, each having 4 red barb-tipped spines, up to 7.5-12 mm long, which mature dry, pale brown or golden brown when ripe, enabling attachment to passing hairy/feathered surfaces as vector, and/or to aid wind dispersal, tiny spines occasionally occur in between foremost spines.

SIMILAR TAXA
Acaena pallida is similar but only found in coastal gravels and dunes. It too and can be shiny especially new growth, it also has red spikes on unripe fruit. It differs by generally having larger leaflets 6-30 × 3-13 mm (compared to 4-17 × 2-10 mm) and has very hairy stems. The leaflets are not hair-tipped as is seen in *A. novae-zelandiae*. *A. pallida* is not as common due to its habitat requirements.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. **North Island**, **South Island**, **Stewart Island**, **Chatham Islands**, **Campbell Island**, Also found in South East **Australia**, and **New Guinea**.

HABITAT
Lowland to alpine (0-1700m.a.s.l.), from forest edge to open grassland scrubland and coastal environments.

GENUS
Acaena

FAMILY
Rosaceae

AUTHORITY
Acaena novae-zelandiae Kirk

TAXONOMIC NOTES
A. novae-zelandiae is naturalised on Campbell Island, where it readily hybridises with *A. minor var. antarctica*; it is also naturalised in Britain, Ireland and California.
This species is renowned to hybridise with other New Zealand species, in Dawson (1960), it is suggested this species is often one of the parents and produces vigorous unusual specimens which may make it difficult for the observer to define.

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October-February.

FRUITING
November-June.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
acaena: From the Greek ‘akanthos’ thorn, referring to the spiny calyx that many species have
novae-zelandiae: Of New Zealand

NVS CODE
ACANOV

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 42

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, TL Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland” Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. pg. 360-361.
Dawson JW. 1960. Natural Acaena hybrids in the vicinity of Wellington. In *Transactions of the Royal Society of New Zealand* Volume 88: pp. 13-27.
Lloyd K. 2001. A Key and notes for *Acaena* (Rosaceae) in New Zealand. *Botanical Society of Otago Newsletter 25*. Pgs.10-14.
Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ. 1988. Flora of New Zealand, Volume IV. Naturalised Pteridophytes, Gymnosperms, Dicotyledons. Botany Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Christchurch, NZ. Pg. 1062.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by MD Ward (August 29th 2025). Description adapted from Lloyd (2001), Webb *et. al.* (1988), Allan (1961).
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MORE INFORMATION

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

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