Acaena saccaticupula

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 attractive evergreen dull green to bluish green herb, which spreads up to a 1 metre across and about 5cm in height. The pinnate leaves are delicate and toothed, and may have a pinkish, contrasting coloured margin. The globe shaped flower balls are red on a robust red stem, and grow into a cluster of hooked spikes, which when ripe become light brown, become firm and may hook on to your socks or laces when brushed past in order to disperse.



Acaena saccaticupula, Huxley Valley. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 03/01/2015, Licence: CC BY.



Acaena saccaticupula on alpine scree, Timaru Valley. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 06/01/2017, Licence: CC BY.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Stoloniferous, prostrate, trailing perennial herb, forming a dense mat up to 1 metre in diameter. **Stems** 1-1.7 mm diameter, up to 30 cm long, and/or 5 cm high, rooting at nodes; **Stipules** perfect, trifid to pentafid; **Leaves** odd-pinnate, between 9-130 mm long with 9-15 leaflets; **Leaflets** obovate or deltoid reducing in size from distal to proximal, serrated toothed margin, 5-8 blunt teeth lacking hair-tip, dull green to bluish green on both surfaces occasionally with pink tinged margin, upper surface keeled, glabrous or sparingly hairy on underside veins and margin; **Inflorescence scape** up to 100 mm, extending up to 300 mm when fruiting, stout, red, hairless; **Capitulum** of 80-100 florets, each floret has 4 sepals, 2 stamen, dark red anthers, 1 style, 1 achene, 6-9mm diameter in flower, when mature including spines less than 15mm diameter; **Fruit** roughly cone-shaped, each having 4 barb-tipped spines, 2-4 mm long, which mature dry, pale 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
Most similar to *Acaena magellanica* yet should not be confused as it can only be found on Macquarie Island, not mainland New Zealand.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. **South Island** only, mainly East of the Alps, from Marlborough to Otago.

HABITAT
Montane to alpine (900-1900 m.a.s.l.), prefers open sheltered sites, amongst snow-tussock grassland, fellfield, herbfield, and persistently snow-covered areas.

GENUS
Acaena

FAMILY
Rosaceae

AUTHORITY
Acaena saccaticupula Bitter

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December-January.

FRUITING
January-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
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
saccaticupula: From the Latin saccata (bag) and cupula (cup-shaped)

NVS CODE
ACASAC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.126

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 Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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

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. 112.

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.

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. 1063-64.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by MD Ward (August 29th 2025). Description adapted from Mark (2012), Lloyd (2001), Webb *et. al.* (1988).

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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