Aciphylla cartilaginea

COMMON NAMES
Stewart Island speargrass

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Low growing clump forming thick-leaved orange-green spikey herb. A Stewart Island endemic, whose leaves are much divided, and has orange stemmed robust flower spikes.



Mt Allen, Tin Range, Stewart Island, 700m elevation. Photographer: Rowan Hindmarsh-Walls, Date taken: 15/03/2017, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Low-growing cartilaginous-leaved herb. Rosettes single to several, closely-spaced. **Leaves** 6-9 cm long; pinnae stiff, usually in 2 pairs, 30-40 × 2.5-3 mm wide, grooved; midrib conspicuous, broad, yellow; margins thick, obvious, yellow; apex pungent. **Flowering stems** up to 200 mm tall but usually shorter particularly in male plants, appearing thick for size of plant, orange, umbels 5-6, crowded, more spreading in female plants and on obvious rays, in males flower barely exceeding bract sheath; sheaths broad. **Fruit** consisting of 2 mericarps; mericarps (3.0-)3.5-5.5 mm, mostly with 5 ribs and single internal vittae.



Table Hill, Tin Range, 500m elevation. Photographer: Rowan Hindmarsh-Walls, Date taken: 17/03/2017, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Closest in similarity to *Aciphylla kirkii* of Central Otago which does not have such obvious thickened margins to the leaf and whose range does not overlap with *A. cartilaginea*.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Rakiura | **Stewart Island**, Mt Rakeahua and Tin Range south to Smith's Lookout

HABITAT
Montane to low alpine (600 - 900 m.a.s.l.), subalpine boggy grassland and herbfield.

GENUS
Aciphylla

FAMILY
Apiaceae

AUTHORITY
Aciphylla cartilaginea Petrie

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December - January.

FRUITING
February - March.

ETYMOLOGY
aciphylla: From the Latin acicula ‘needle’ and the Greek phyllum ‘leaf’, meaning needle-leaf.
cartilaginea: Like cartilage

NVS CODE
ACICAR

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, RR
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 428 p.
Wilson HD. 1996. *Wild plants of Mount Cook National Park*. Manuka Press, Christchurch.
Wilson HD. 1982. *Stewart Island plants*. Whitcoulls Ltd, Christchurch

ATTRIBUTION
Description adapted from Allan (1961), Webb and Simpson (2001), Wilson (1996) and Wilson (1982).
Some of this factsheet information is derived from Flora of New Zealand Online and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aciphylla-cartilaginea/

PDF DATE
08 October 2026