

Aciphylla leighii

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Distinctive stocky herb, close-set rosettes up to 70 mm in diameter forming a cushion-like plant up to 1 m across, taproot stout, deeply descending. **Leaves** approximately 5 cm long, spreading, 3-foliolate (including the diverging stipules); sheaths approximately 35 mm long, white with hyaline margins, thickening above and curving outwards, striate, narrowing upwards to 6 mm from base 10 mm wide, milky juice copious. **Lamina** about 16 mm x 4 mm, linear-oblong, dark green, shallowly canaliculate; margins cartilaginous, apex blunt to retuse (but with short mucro). Male plants with striate **flowering stems** up to about 5 cm long, surrounded by paniculately arranged compound umbels forming an inflorescence approximately 40-60 mm diameter. Primary rays 3-4, rather stout, unequal, up to approximately 40 mm long, invested by general involucre of leaf-like bracts about 20 mm long. **Secondary umbels** up to 20-25 mm diameter, with narrow-linear acicular bracteoles approximately 10 mm long (occasionally with trifoliolate lamina); rays 7-10, up to approximately 6 mm long. **Tertiary umbels** crowded, 5-6 mm long; bracteoles filiform. Sepals greenish, incurved, linear, acute, enlarging after petal-fall to 2 mm long, with short claw. Stamens exerted at anthesis; petals minute, white. Female plants not described in detail.

SIMILAR TAXA

Aciphylla dobsonii larger plant than *A. leighii*; leaves are longer at about 10 cm long, leaf tips are hard and very sharp, peduncles are very stout compared to rather slender in *A. leighii*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island, Fiordland, Darran Mountains.

HABITAT

Confined to fellfield (1800-2000 m.a.s.l.).

GENUS

Aciphylla

FAMILY

Apiaceae

AUTHORITY

Aciphylla leighii Allan

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Rogers *et. al.*, suggest this species may hybridise with *Aciphylla congesta*, as a possible explanation for the variation in leaf apices.



Aciphylla leighii. Photographer: Geoffrey M. Rogers, Licence: CC BY-SA.



Aciphylla leighii. Photographer: Geoffrey M. Rogers, Licence: CC BY-SA.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - January

FRUITING

February - March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Winged schizocarps are dispersed primarily by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY

aciphylla: From the Latin acicula 'needle' and the Greek phyllum 'leaf', meaning needle-leaf.

NVS CODE

ACILEI

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, St

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, H. H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. 1. Wellington: Government Printer. pg. 469-470.

Lyttle, D. 2021 Personal Communication 14th December, Flowering times, Specimen collected used for Nancy Adams painting, circa 1969.

Mark, A. F. 2012. Above the Treeline: A Nature Guide to Alpine New Zealand. Craig Potton Publishing, Nelson. pg. 150.

Rogers, G., Torr, S., Coats, G., Rance, B., 1999. *Aciphylla leighii* - A Nival Zone Speargrass from the Darran Mountains, Fiordland. New Zealand Botanical Society Journal No 57. September 1999. Pg. 12-15.

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 2009 Vol. 11 No. 4 pp. 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by M. Ward from Allan (1961).

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aciphylla-leighii/>

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