

Aciphylla simplex

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

A sprawling prickly cushion forming herb up to 0.6 metres across. Leaves are sharp-pointed and bronze coloured, spikes of whiteish flowers protrude on elongated stems up to 100mm long.

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rootstock usually multicapital, each branch bearing a dense rosette of leaves, the whole plant forming cushion-like masses up to 0.6 metre diameter and 100 mm tall. **Leaves** simple, sessile on submembranous sheaths up to more or less 40 × 10 mm. **Lamina** straight or curved, exstipulate, concavo-convex, 30–100 mm long, tapering to blunt but mucronulate apex, hard, rigid. with thickened margins. **Stems** stout, grooved, up to approximately 100 × 5 mm; **Inflorescence** a more or less globose panicle, with oblong-lanceolate, acute bracts up to 25 mm long. **Umbels** few, densely flowered, forming an inflorescence up to 50 mm diameter, on peduncles 10–25 mm. long. **Secondary umbels** globose, up to approximately 15 mm diameter; rays very slender, short. **Secondary umbels** of female plants up to approximately 30 mm diameter. **Mericarps** 2.7–4.0(–4.5) mm long, broadly-elliptic to ovate elliptic, ribs 5 evenly winged, lacking vittae.

SIMILAR TAXA

Similar to *Aciphylla dobsonii*, which can be differentiated by its leaf structure having stipules because its leaves are compound, compared to simple in *A. simplex*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Te Waipounamu | South Island, exclusively Central Otago/Northern Southland, Mt Pisa, Mt Cardrona in the North, Old Man Range in the East, Eyre Mountains in the South-West.

HABITAT

High-alpine (1500 – 2000 m.a.s.l.), confined to fellfield and ledges of rocky bluffs.

THREATS

This species is threatened due to its limited range and generally being biologically sparse. When a plant has such a limited range anything such as a landslide may have an overwhelming impact on its existence in that particular area, and therefore the overall population.

GENUS

Aciphylla

FAMILY

Apiaceae



Hector Mountains. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Lyperobius weevils eating speargrass, Pisa Range, Otago. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 02/01/1992, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Aciphylla simplex Petrie

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November – January.

FRUITING

December – 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.

simplex: Simple, not compound

NVS CODE

ACISMP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 22

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, RR, Sp

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NR, NS, NStr, RR, Sp, St, TL 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 I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
- Mark AF. 2012. *Above the Treeline: A Nature Guide to Alpine New Zealand*. Craig Potton Publishing, Nelson. pg.150.
- 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 & Simpson MJA. 2001. *Seeds of NZ gymnosperms and dicotyledons*. Manuka Press, Christchurch.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by MD Ward (December 17th 2025). Description adapted from Allan (1961) & Mark (2012).

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