Asplenium bulbiferum

COMMON NAMES
hen and chicken fern, pikopiko, mother spleenwort

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Ferns

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizome short, stout, erect, bearing ovate scales up to 15 × 5 mm. **Stipes** 50–300 mm long, brown on underside, green above, stout, covered in small brown ovate scales. **Laminae** lanceolate to elliptic, 0.15–1.20 m, 70–300 mm, bi- to tripinnate, sometimes bearing bulbils. **Raches** pale green to yellow-green, scaly, prominently grooved. **Pinnae** 15–30 (or more) pairs, ovate to narrowly ovate, acuminate, shortly stalked, 30–200 × 10–50 mm, scaly on underside, basal pair pointing downwards when fresh. **Secondary pinnae** sessile or shortly stalked, very narrowly elliptic to ovate or elliptic, obtuse, deeply serrate or sometimes almost pinnate, decreasing in size from base to apex, basal acroscopic pinnule often enlarged (up to 40 × 10 mm). **Ultimate pinnules** narrowly oblong, ± entire to crenate-serrate, up to 10 mm long. **Sori** numerous, broad, submarginal, 2–4 mm long.

Silverstream, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 05/04/2006, Licence: CC BY.

Sorus. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/02/1981, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Asplenium bulbiferum, the world famous hen & chicken fern is only ever likely to be confused with the closely related *A. gracillimum*. From that species it is distinguished by its usually bulbiferous; mostly pale green fronds and ovate stipe scales which lack long filiform apices. *Asplenium bulbiferum* is a tetraploid (2n = 144) and *A. gracillimum* an octoploid (2n = 288), so hybrids between these two species are sterile.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands.

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine. Usually in lowland forest where it is a common species of the ground-layer, especially in high rainfall areas. Commonly associated with riparian forest, and as a species of base-rich substrates. Frequently sympatric and so commonly forming hybrids with other asplenia. It is commonly sympatric with *A. gracillimum* Colenso.

GENUS
Asplenium

FAMILY
Aspleniaceae

AUTHORITY
Asplenium bulbiferum G. Forst.

SYNONYMS
Asplenium marinum var. bulbifera (G.Forst.) F.Muell.; Caenopteris bulbifera (G.Forst.) Desv.;

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown, and popular in cultivation. However, most plants sold as this species are the sterile hybrid *A.* ×*lucrosum* Perrie et Brownsey (*A. bulbliferum* × *A. dimorphum* Kunze). An excellent pot plant but as with all asplenia prone to infestations of scale and mealy bugs.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
UPL: Obligate Upland
Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION
Commonly sold by many plant nurseries. However some plants sold as this species are in fact a sterile hybrid A. x lucrosum (A. bulbiferum x A. dimorphum).

ETYMOLOGY
asplenium: From the Greek a- 'without' and splene 'spleen', a northern hemisphere species, the black spleenwort (Asplenium adiantum-nigrum), was once believed to be a cure for diseases of the spleen.
bulbiferum: Bearing bulbills or bulbs

NVS CODE
ASPBUL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 144

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
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 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 At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, Sp 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
Brownsey PJ. 1977. A taxonomic revision of the New Zealand species of *Asplenium*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 15(1)*: 39–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1977.10429618.

ATTRIBUTION
Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (3 February 2005). Description from: Brownsey (1977)

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/asplenium-bulbiferum/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026