

Dracophyllum elegantissimum

COMMON NAMES

grass tree, slender dragon tree

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

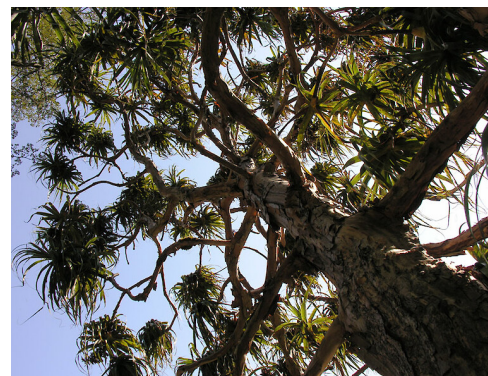
Single-stemmed, grass tree up to 14 m tall, branch terminals bearing tufts of long, narrow leaves with curled ends. Flowers pink, borne in terminal panicles, these often obscured by leaves

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink



Dracophyllum elegantissimum juvenile, Campbell Creek. Photographer: Simon Walls, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Snow River, Kahurangi National park, Nov, 2009. Photographer: Simon Walls, Date taken: 01/11/2009, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tree 5–14 m tall with a single stem. Branches form a closed candelabrum-shaped crown. Bark on old stems light brown and flaky, on branchlets glabrous and yellowish brown. Leaves crowded at tips of branches in a bromelioid manner, old leaves sometimes present; lamina sheath light brown, 22–58 x 13–43 mm, coriaceous, striate, margin not membranous, shoulder tapering with a smooth margin; lamina coriaceous, light to mid green, linear to linear-triangular, 330–1000 x 10–20 (–32) mm, glabrous, prominently striated; margin cartilaginous, serrulate with 15–24 teeth per 10 mm; apex acute and prominently curled. Inflorescence a terminal panicle, shorter than the leaves, erect, dense, 190–320 mm long, pyramidal, densely branched; rachis and pedicels tomentose; inflorescence axis light green, 10.6–14.0 mm diam. at base; basal inflorescence branch 38–42(–55) mm long, widely spreading (50–90°); inflorescence bracts caducous, longer than flower, coriaceous, light green, ovate-triangular at base, 270–610 x 30–45 mm, glabrous; margin entire; apex acute. Flowers 600–1000 or more, arranged in groups of >10 on the basal inflorescence branches; bracteole caducous, shorter than flower, linear 2.0–8.0 x 0.5–1.5 mm, glabrous; pedicel straight, green, 0.5–2.0 mm long, tomentose. Sepals green, broadly ovate, 1–2 x 1.0–1.5 mm, shorter than corolla tube, striate, glabrous; margin ciliate; apex subacute to obtuse. Corolla light to dark pink; corolla tube campanulate, widened at mouth, 1.0–2.0 x 1.3–2.0 mm, exterior glabrous; corolla lobes spreading horizontally to reflexed, ovate-triangular, shorter than corolla tube, 1.2–1.4 x 1.0–1.3 mm; glabrous, apex obtuse. Stamens inserted at top of corolla tube; filament 0.3–0.5 mm long; anthers exserted, rectangular, young anthers pink, deep yellow when mature, 0.9–1.3 mm long. Ovary globose, 1.0–1.5 x 1.3–1.5 mm; apex tapering and glabrous; nectary scales separate, rectangular, 0.6–1.0 x 0.5–1.0 mm, apices subacute to irregularly toothed; style exserted, 1.5–1.7 mm long, glabrous, lengthening in fruit; stigma clavate. Fruit not enclosed in persistent sepals, reddish brown, 1.2–1.5 x 1.5–1.8 mm, depressed-globose; apex round and glabrous. Seed yellowish brown, filiform, 0.7–0.8 mm long with a slightly reticulated testa.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Dracophyllum traversii* from which it differs by the longer, narrower leaves with curled apices; longer inflorescence bracts; sepals and corolla lobes that are shorter than the corolla tube; smaller nectary scales with toothed margins; and smaller ovary. From *Dracophyllum latifolium* it is distinguished by the longer inflorescence bracts; smaller corolla tube; corolla lobes that are shorter than the corolla tube; shorter filaments; narrower nectary scales and smaller ovary.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (westerly from Nelson to northern Westland)

HABITAT

Lowland to upper montane (160–980 m a.s.l.). A species of forest communities overlying granodiorite, calcareous sandstone and conglomerate, or limestone. All the known populations occur on gentle to steep (5–45°) south-west to north-west-facing mountain slopes.

GENUS

Dracophyllum

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum elegantissimum S.Venter

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - February

FRUITING

February - March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult - should not be removed from the wild

ETYMOLOGY

dracophyllum: Dragon leaf, from its likeness to the dragon tree of the Canary Islands

NVS CODE

DRAELE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Venter, S. 2007: *Dracophyllum elegantissimum* (Ericaceae), a new species from north-west Nelson, New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 42: 37-43.

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* 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (29 March 2008). Description adapted from Venter (2007)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/dracophyllum-elegantissimum/>

PDF DATE

07 June 2026