Dracophyllum kirkii

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Low-growing sprawling shrub bearing erect tufts of blue-green narrow tapering leaves inhabiting West Coast mountains. Leaves 42-60mm x 4-5mm at widest point. Flowers tubular, mixed in leaves at base of leaf tufts. Fruit a dry capsule.



Dracophyllum kirkii, Mt Cook National Park. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 24/04/2014, Licence: CC BY.



Godley Valley. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 24/01/2013, Licence: CC BY-NC-SA.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Decumbent to spreading multi–stemmed shrub, 0.2–1.4 m tall. Bark on old branches grey to dark grey, smooth or finely fissured, young stems reddish brown. Leaves dimorphic; juvenile leaves: spirally arranged along branches, spreading, glaucous; lamina sheath 9.3–7.5 × 5.4–8.0 mm, coriaceous, tapering and margin ciliate in upper half; lamina coriaceous, 42.0–60.0 × 4.0–4.7 mm, linear–triangular, surfaces glabrous; margins serrulate with 80–90 teeth per 10 mm; adult leaves spreading, glaucous to occasionally light green; lamina sheath 4.0–10.0 × 3.5–9.0 mm, subcoriaceous, striate, shoulders tapering to auricled and margin membranous, smooth to ciliate in the top half;adult lamina linear–triangular, 16.0–70.0 × 1.5–4.0 mm, prominently striated; margins serrulate with 90–110 teeth per 10 mm. Inflorescence a solitary sessile and erect flower near apices of branches; shorter than leaves; inflorescence bract over-topping flower, glaucous, 8.0–20.0 × 2.0–2.6 mm, ovate, surfaces glabrous, margins ciliate. Sepals 6.5–7.0 × 2–3 mm, ovate, shorter than to equaling corolla tube; margins ciliate. Corolla white; corolla tube 5.0–6.0 × 2.0–2.5 mm, cylindrical; corolla lobes reflexed, 1.8–2.0 × 1.0–1.5 mm, ovate–triangular to triangular, shorter than corolla tube, apices acute to subacute; apical ridge present, adaxial surface papillate. Stamens inserted on corolla tube in upper third, filaments 0.4–0.6 mm long; anthers included, oblong, light yellow and 0.8–1.2 mm long. Ovary cylindrical to ovate, 1.8–2.0 × 1.5–2.0 mm, glabrous, apex round; nectary scales rectangular, 1.0–1.5 × 0.7–0.9 mm, apices retuse; style included, 0.7–2.0 mm long, glabrous; stigma capitate. Fruit light brown, 2.7–3.0 × 2.3–2.5 mm, broadly obovoid, apex round, glabrous. Seeds light brown, ovoid, 0.95–1.0 mm long, testa slightly reticulate.

SIMILAR TAXA
Dracophyllum kirkii is easily recognised by its sprawling habit with the branchlets erect at the tips; smooth, dark grey bark with shallow fissures; glaucous leaves, with the lamina 20–40 × 2–4 mm, and the lamina sheath not much wider than lamina and the lamina base scabrous; flowers solitary; corolla tube 5 mm long and shorter to equaling the sepals. Dracophyllum kirkii seems most closely allied to D. pubescens, which differs in having pubescent leaves and 3–5–flowered racemes. Although Dracophyllum kirkii resembles D. pubescens in having glaucous leaves, these are always glabrous not pubescent and the inflorescence is always a solitary flower.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (southern Nelson southwards to West Canterbury and North Westland)

HABITAT
Dracophyllum kirkii is a species of subalpine shrubland, tussock grassland, fell field and herbfield on gentle to moderately steep mountain slopes, ridgelines as well as on bluffs and boulderfalls

GENUS
Dracophyllum

FAMILY
Ericaceae

AUTHORITY
Dracophyllum kirkii Bergg.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October – April

FRUITING
Throughout the year

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult - should not be removed from the wild

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY
dracophyllum: Dragon leaf, from its likeness to the dragon tree of the Canary Islands
kirkii: After Thomas Kirk (18 January 1828 - 8 March 1898), a NZ botanist and lecturer in natural sciences and regarded as a leader of botanical enquiry in NZ for over three decades. One of his most significant publications was Forest flora of NZ (1889) but he also contributed over 130 papers to the Transactions and Proceedings of the NZ Institute and other journals.

NVS CODE
DRAKIR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 26

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

Venter, S. 2009: A taxonomic revision of the genus Dracophyllum Labill. (Ericaceae). Unpublished Phd Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.

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 (6 June 2012). Description adapted from Venter (2009)

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/dracophyllum-kirkii/

PDF DATE

07 June 2026