

Dracophyllum lessonianum

COMMON NAMES

gumland grass tree

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Erect grassy shrub with light grey bark and many erect twigs bearing long very narrow pointed leaves in habiting the northern North Island. Leaves 3-11cm long by 1mm wide, abruptly widening to a sheath that encloses stem and with a small patch of tiny hairs at the base (lens needed).

FLOWER COLOURS

White



Dracophyllum lessonianum growth habit, November, Kopouatai. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Dracophyllum lessonianum Flowers, November, Kopouatai. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Erect to spreading single-stemmed shrub or tree 0.5–5 m tall. Branches: bark on old branches grey to dark brown, finely fissured or occasionally deeply fissured on very old stems, young stems reddish brown. Leaves dimorphic. Juvenile leaves spirally arranged along branches, erect to spreading; lamina sheath 8.0–17.0 × 3.7–5.0 mm, yellowish green; shoulders truncate to auricled and margin ciliate or ciliate in upper half; lamina coriaceous, 60.0–120.0 × 1.6–1.8 mm, linear to linear-subulate; surfaces glabrous; margin serrulate with 50–78 teeth per 10 mm; adult leaves spreading; lamina sheath light green, 6.0–14 × 2–4 mm, membranous, shoulders truncate to auricled and margin with the top half ciliate; lamina light to olive green, 20.0–108.0 × 0.5–1.2 mm, linear to linear-subulate, surfaces glabrous with a tuft of scabrid hairs at the base of adaxial surface; margins serrulate with 53–70 teeth per 10 mm; apex triquetrous. Inflorescence a terminal spike on lateral branchlets, shorter than the leaves, erect, lax, 20–50 mm long, linear-oblong; inflorescence bract over-topping flowers, coriaceous to rigid and hard, 6.0–17.5 × 0.6–3.3 mm, light to dark green, subulate; adaxial surface scabrid at base; abaxial surface glabrous to pubescent at the apex; margins entire. Flowers 3–9, sessile; flower bract over-topping flowers, foliose, coriaceous to rigid and hard, 8.0–12.5 × 0.5–0.7 mm, ovate-lanceolate, surfaces glabrous with a tuft of scabrid hair at base of adaxial surface, margins serrulate and white, apices acute and dark coloured. Sepals 6–8 × 1.5–2.0 mm, lanceolate to ovate-lanceolate, longer than corolla tube; surfaces glabrous with top half of adaxial surface pubescent; margins ciliate; apices acuminate and hard. Corolla white to pinkish; corolla tube 4.0–6.0 × 2.0–2.5 mm, cylindrical, widened at mouth; corolla lobes spreading horizontally, reflexed in old flowers, 2.5–3.0 × 1.0–1.5 mm, ovate triangular, shorter than corolla tube, inflexed at apex, apices acute; surfaces glabrous. Stamens inserted on corolla tube in upper third, filaments 0.3–0.5 mm long; anthers included, oblong, light yellow and 0.9–1.0 mm long. Ovary 1.3–1.5 × 1.2–1.3 mm, oblong, apex truncate; nectary scales 1.0–1.3 × 0.5–0.6 mm, rectangular, apices subacute; style included, 1.5–2.0 mm long, glabrous; stigma capitate. Fruit sessile, 4.0–4.5 × 1.7–2.0 mm, light brown, oblong, apex truncate, glabrous. Seeds 1.0–1.2 mm long, yellowish brown, ovoid, testa slightly reticulate.

SIMILAR TAXA

Dracophyllum lessonianum is a northern North Island species which is easily recognised by the distinctive, up swept, erect-spreading branches with dark grey, smooth bark; dimorphic foliage (i.e. with distinct juvenile and adult leaves); adult leaves which have auricled lamina sheaths with pale margins; and by the base of the lamina which is covered in short hairs and has a triquetrous apex. The inflorescences are in racemes that terminate the lateral branches, while the persistent flower bracts are long, narrow and sheathing. The sepals of *D. lessonianum* are slightly longer (6–8 mm) than the corolla tube, with hardened apices and are internally covered in white hairs. From other superficially similar species (*D. filifolium*, *D. longifolium* var. *longifolium*, *D. urvilleanum*) *D. lessonianum* is best distinguished by the long racemose inflorescences, long acuminate sepals (with hard apices) and long narrow, flowers. It is most similar to *D. filifolium* (with which it never grows) and from which it differs by its dimorphic foliage (i.e. with distinct juvenile and adult leaves), sepals which are longer than the corolla tube, by the inflorescence bracts and flower bracts which have broad white margins and by the apex of the ovary which is truncate not round.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from Te Paki south to Kopouatai Peat Dome in the east and the Kawhia Harbour in the west)

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland (up to 100 m a.s.l.). Usually in gumland scrub or on peat, sometimes in the upper areas of salt marsh. Often in open sparsely vegetated sites, or in shrubland. Sometimes locally dominant. Often found growing with *Leptospermum scoparium* and *Epacris pauciflora*.

THREATS

Not Threatened. However, very uncommon south of about Whangarei

GENUS

Dracophyllum

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum lessonianum A.Rich.

SYNONYMS

Dracophyllum robustum Hook. f.; *Dracophyllum lessonianum* var. *robustum* (Hook. f.) Hook.f.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November–September

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

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY

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

NVS CODE

DRALES

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

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (20 April 2012). Description adapted from Venter (2009)

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

07 June 2026