

# Dracophyllum politum

## 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 tight-packed hard cushion or sprawling small shrub with very small narrow glossy leaves covering the twigs inhabiting some mountain areas of the South Island. Leaves to 12mm long, pressed close to twig. Flowers small white, solitary at tip of hidden branches, but can cover surface of cushion.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Cushion-forming, up to 0.5 m tall and 1 m in diameter, or a scrambler 0.02–0.5 m tall. Branches spreading to prostrate, much-branched. Bark on old stems grey to brown, broadly fissured, young stems reddish brown. Leaves imbricate, appressed to stem, erect, olive to dark green, dry old leaves present. Leaf sheath 2.5–4.0 × 3.0–4.0 mm, shoulders tapering to round and margin membranous, ciliate. Lamina rigid and hard, 3.5–17.2 × 0.7–1.5 mm, linear, adaxial surface flat; surfaces glossy, margins serrulate with 90–100 teeth per 10 mm; apex obtuse or occasionally subacute. Inflorescence a sessile, solitary terminal flower; shorter than leaves, erect. Flower bract shorter than flower, foliose, 2.0–3.0 × 0.7–0.8 mm, broadly ovate to triangular, margins serrulate, apices obtuse. Sepals 4.8–5.0 × 1.8–2.0 mm, ovate-lanceolate, longer than corolla tube, adaxial surface with top half pubescent; abaxial surface glabrous; margins ciliate. Corolla white; corolla tube 3.5–4.5 × 1.4–1.5 mm cylindrical, widened at mouth; corolla lobes spreading horizontally to reflexed, 1.5–2.2 × 1.0–1.8 mm, ovate-triangular, shorter than corolla tube, apical ridge present, inflexed at apex, obtuse; adaxial surface papillate. Stamens inserted on corolla tube in upper third, filaments 0.5–1.0 mm long; anthers included, 0.9–1.0 mm long, oblong, light yellow. Ovary 1.2–1.8 × 1.2–1.3 mm, ovate, apex round; nectary scales 0.8–1.2 × 0.5–0.7 mm, rectangular, apices irregularly toothed; style included, 1.0–1.1 mm long, glabrous, not lengthening in fruit; stigma five-lobed. Fruit 2.5–3.0 × 1.5–2.5 mm, dark brown, oblong and ridged at the ribs; apex round, glabrous. Seeds 0.68–0.7 mm long, dark brown, ovoid, testa prominently reticulate.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Dracophyllum politum* is a distinctive, dense cushion-forming plant or a prostrate shrublet with densely imbricated leaves appressed to the branch. The leaves are very glossy, convex, slightly curved inwards and with obtuse apices. The flowers are solitary and the flower bracts have blunt apices. The corolla lobes are distinctively inflexed and have a prominent apical ridges.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South (North-west Nelson (Mount Goul), North Westland (Denniston area) Fiordland National Park, Otago (Mount Maungatua)) and Stewart Islands



*Dracophyllum politum* in flower, Stewart Island.  
Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken:  
14/12/2016, Licence: CC BY.



*Dracophyllum politum* habit, Stewart Island.  
Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken:  
26/03/2016, Licence: CC BY.

## HABITAT

Montane to alpine in fully exposed sites on gentle mountain slopes, especially on mountain summits and plateaus. A sparse to locally common component of subalpine to alpine shrubland, herbfield, fell field, grassland or bog.

## GENUS

Dracophyllum

## FAMILY

Ericaceae

## AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum politum (Cheeseman) Cockayne

## SYNONYMS

Dracophyllum rosmarinifolium var. politum Cheeseman

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

December - March

## FRUITING

February - May

## 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

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

## ETYMOLOGY

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

## NVS CODE

DRAPOL

## 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 At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, RR, 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

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 (16 April 2012). Description adapted from Venter (2009)

## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

08 June 2026