

Dracophyllum urvilleanum

COMMON NAMES

D'urvilles grass tree

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Erect grassy shrub with many very long and fine grass-like wavy leaves inhabiting the northern tip of the South Island. Leaves 54-128mm long by 0.4-1.7mm wide, abruptly narrowing to a lobed base that sheaths the stem. Flowers white, in clusters of 2-4 on short side branches, nearly hidden by leaves.

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Small single-stemmed shrub or small tree 2–8 m tall. Bark on old branches grey to greyish brown, finely fissured, young stems reddish brown. Leaves dimorphic. Juvenile leaves spirally arranged along branches, spreading to recurved; lamina sheath 5.0–6.0 × 1.3–1.5 mm, truncate, yellowish green, margin membranous with the upper half ciliate; lamina 79.0–145.0 × 1.5–3.7 mm, linear-triangular, margins serrulate with 40–50 teeth per 10 mm. Adult leaves spreading to recurved; lamina sheath 3.6–9.0 × 2.5–3.0 mm, thinly coriaceous, shoulders truncate to auricled and margins membranous with the top half ciliate; lamina 33.0–128.0 × 0.42–1.68 mm, linear to linear-triangular, adaxial surface sometimes shortly scabrid; margins serrulate with 45–60 teeth per 10 mm.

Inflorescence a terminal raceme on lateral branchlets; shorter than leaves, erect, lax, 14–23 mm long, oblong. Inflorescence bract overtopping flowers, 15.4–35.0 × 0.5–0.6 mm, ovate-lanceolate, surfaces rugose; margins serrulate. Flowers hidden by leaves, 2–5, pedicellate; flower bracts overtopping flowers, 11.3–15.6 × 0.4–0.5 mm, narrowly ovate; margins ciliate; pedicel 0.5–0.7 mm long. Sepals 5.5–7.0 × 1.2–3.0 mm, ovate-lanceolate, equaling corolla tube, adaxial surface with the top half pubescent; margins ciliate in the upper half; apices acute. Corolla white; corolla tube 3.5–5.0 × 1.5–2.0 mm, narrowly-campanulate, widened at mouth; corolla lobes spreading to reflexed, 1.9–2.0 × 1.3–1.5 mm, ovate, shorter than corolla tube, apices acute, adaxial surface papillate. Stamens inserted on corolla tube in the upper third, filaments 0.5–0.8 mm long; anthers included, 0.5–1.0 mm long, oblong, light yellow. Ovary 1.0–1.5 × 1.0–1.3 mm, globose, apex round to truncate; nectary scales 0.5–0.6 × 0.4–0.5 mm, rectangular; apices subacute to retuse; style included, 1.3–2.0 mm long, glabrous, not lengthening in fruit; stigma capitate. Fruit with the old sepals widely spreading, 2–3 × 2.0–2.5 mm, oblong, light brown; apex truncate. Seeds 0.95–1.0 mm, ovoid, yellowish brown, testa slightly reticulate.



Dracophyllum urvilleanum. Photographer: Shannel Courtney, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Dracophyllum urvilleanum. Photographer: Shannel Courtney, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA

Dracophyllum urvilleanum is recognised by the dimorphic foliage (juvenile and adult), thinly textured wide juvenile leaves, adult leaves which are long-linear and with lamina sheaths which are truncate or with auricled shoulders;; flowers in short (14–23 mm) few-flowered (2–4) racemes, with the flower bract overtopping the flower, and which have a narrowly-campanulate corolla tube, with the style longer than the ovary and the fruit enclosed in widely spreading persistent sepals. *Dracophyllum urvilleanum* is most similar to *D. oliveri* from which it differs by having narrower, more thinly textured juvenile leaves; longer and narrower drooping adult leaves, and fewer flowered (mostly 2–3 flowers not 5–10) racemes and truncate not round fruit apices. *Dracophyllum urvilleanum* does not grow within the range of *D. oliveri*. *Dracophyllum urvilleanum* is easily confused with *D. filifolium* from which it differs in having dimorphic foliage (juvenile and adult), smooth adult leaf surfaces (weakly striated in *D. filifolium*), inflorescences in racemes rather than spikes; bracts with serrulate rather than ciliate margins, and longer ((15.4–35.0 mm cf. 8.5–17.0 mm in *D. filifolium*). Also the flowers of *D. filifolium* are cylindrical rather campanulate (*D. urvilleanum*)

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. northern South Island where it is known from Abel Tasman National Park eastwards to the Marlborough Sounds.

HABITAT

Coastal. Growing on cliff faces and in coastal scrub and forest often within the splash zone.

THREATS

Though widespread, the species is threatened at a few sites by coastal development, human traffic. Fire is considered a serious potential threat at the majority of sites. This is because the species is very flammable and following fire many of the coastal habitats in which this species grows become dominated by gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) which appears to out compete it.

GENUS

Dracophyllum

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum urvilleanum A.Rich.

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(September-) October to January

FRUITING

December to March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult to grow without specialist knowledge.

ETYMOLOGY

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

urvilleanum: Named after Jules Sébastien César Dumont d'Urville (23 May 1790 - 8 May 1842) - a French explorer, naval officer and rear admiral, who explored the south and western Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and Antarctica.

NVS CODE

DRAURV

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

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 (3 October 2012). Description adapted from Venter (2009)

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026