

Hymenophyllum rarum

COMMON NAMES

filmy fern

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Evaluated

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial or epiphytic, aromatic fern forming extensive, interwoven, creeping patches. **Rhizomes** long-creeping, very thin, brittle. **Fronds** pale grey-green (glaucous). **Stipes** 20–70 mm long, very thin, wiry when fresh, very brittle when dry, glabrous, not winged; rachises very narrowly winged in upper part. **Laminae** 20–120 × 10–30 mm, narrowly ovate, narrowly elliptic, rarely deltoid, usually 2-pinnate, membranous, glabrous. **Ultimate segments** oblong, imbricate, margins smooth. **Sori** terminating the uppermost ultimate segments, ovoid completely immersed in lamina, few on each primary pinna, mostly confined to upper part of frond. **Indusium flaps** entire. (Description adapted from Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000)).

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily recognised by the peculiar grey-green, small, membranous fronds; by the smooth margins of the pinnae, ultimate segments and indusia; and by the sori which are sunk within the uppermost segments of the uppermost pinnae. Australian plants of *H. rarum* (which include the type of this species) are rather different differing by the non-aromatic, widely spaced rather than imbricating pale green, pinnae. The sori of Australian *H. rarum* are almost not wholly immersed within the pinnae nor confined to the uppermost segments of the uppermost pinnae. It seems likely that New Zealand plants referred to *H. rarum* may warrant recognition as a separate species. Further study into this matter is needed.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Auckland Islands. Also Australia.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Common throughout the country in close forest, scrub, on shaded cliff faces, amongst boulders and in rubble slopes. Rather drought tolerant and often found growing in very exposed sites.

GENUS

Hymenophyllum

FAMILY

Hymenophyllaceae

AUTHORITY

Hymenophyllum rarum R. Br.



Days Bay, Eastbourne. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 03/08/2013, Licence: CC BY.



Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 01/05/2011, Licence: CC BY.

SYNONYMS

Mecodium rarum (R. Br.) Copel.; Hymenophyllum imbricatum Colenso; Hymenophyllum semibivalve Hook. et Grev.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult—should not be removed from the wild.

ETYMOLOGY

hymenophyllum: Membranous leaf, from the Greek humen and phullon

rarum: Thin leaved; from the Latin rarus

NVS CODE

HYMRAR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 72

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 Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

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

Brownsey PJ, Smith-Dodsworth JC. 2000. New Zealand Ferns and Allied Plants. David Bateman, Auckland, NZ. 168 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (20 April 2011). Description adapted from Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/hymenophyllum-rarum/>

PDF DATE

08 June 2026