

Hymenophyllum rufescens

COMMON NAMES

filmy fern

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial or low epiphytic fern forming diffuse creeping patches.

Rhizomes long-creeping, thin, rather brittle. **Fronds** somewhat reddish yellow-green to red-green or dark red-green. **Stipes** 10–800 mm long, thin, brittle, not winged, bearing long, pale red-brown to brown unbranched hairs; rachises very narrowly winged in upper portion.

Laminae 10–50 × 1–50 mm, deltoid, 1–(2)-pinnate, adaxially and abaxially bearing long pale red-brown, brown or reddish white curly hairs (these increasing in density toward laminae base and rachis). **Pinnae** deltoid-flabellate, flabellate, margins smooth. **Sori** terminating ultimate segments, slightly sunk in lamina, several on each primary pinna. **Indusial flaps** entire or minutely toothed.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Hymenophyllum flabellatum* from which it differs by its smaller size, and strongly deltoid fronds whose surfaces are covered in curly usually reddish hairs. The stipes of *H. rufescens* are generally as long as or longer than the frond laminae. Intermediates between *H. rufescens* and *H. flabellatum* occur and these could be hybrids.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand. North Island (from Te Moehau and Mt Pirongia south but often rather uncommon), South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT

Lowland to subalpine. Strictly montane to subalpine in the North Island but descending to almost sea level in the western South Island. Usually a low epiphyte on tree trunks where it is commonly found in tree root caves or on overhanging tree roots. Also in holes on rotting logs, or on damp rock faces, overhangs or amongst boulders. Occasionally sympatric with *H. flabellatum* with which it appears to hybridise.

THREATS

Not Threatened but not that common and biologically sparse so possibly worthy of listing as “At Risk/Naturally Uncommon”

GENUS

Hymenophyllum

FAMILY

Hymenophyllaceae

AUTHORITY

Hymenophyllum rufescens Kirk



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SYNONYMS

Mecodium rufescens (Kirk) Copel.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

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

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

ETYMOLOGY

hymenophyllum: Membranous leaf, from the Greek humen and phullon

NVS CODE

HYMRUF

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 44

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, OL 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-rufescens/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026