

Lepidium obtusatum

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Extinct

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Glabrous decumbent to semi-erect herb forming circular patches up to 300 mm diam. Stems stout, fleshy, somewhat flexuous. Rosette and basal leaf petioles, broad, flat up to 80 mm long. Lamina 30-70 x 5-20 mm, fleshy, succulent, oblong-cuneate, obovate, coarsely crenate-serrate, dark green. Cauline leaves subsessile to sessile, lamina (5-)10-20(-50) x (3-) 5(-15) mm, fleshy-succulent, obovate, ovate to broadly ovate, crenate, rarely toothed, dark green. Inflorescence a terminal raceme (20-)3(-50) mm long, these numerous. Flowers 3-4 mm diam.; pedicels 3-5 mm, erecto-patent sometimes decurved; sepals broadly ovate-oblong, c.1.5. mm long; petals white, obovate < or = to sepals. Stamens 4(-6). Silicle 4.5-5.5 x 4-4.5 mm, broadly ovate, shallowly notched at apex, slightly winged; style very short; stigma = notch. Seeds broadly ovoid to triangular, orange brown, 2 x 2 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Traditionally allied to the *Lepidium banksii* Kirk, from which it is easily distinguished by the decumbent to suberect growth habit, obovate, oblong-crenate leaves, very long petiolate rosette leaves, and glabrous pedicels. Recently obtained (2005) nrDNA ITS/ETS sequences suggest that although nested within the *L. oleraceum* group of *Lepididia* it was not closely allied to either *L. banksii* or *L. oleraceum* s.s. with its sister taxon *Lepidium panniforme* (de Lange et al. 2013).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island, Wellington (Seatoun to Fort Dorset). Not seen since 1950 (on the Miramar peninsula in Wellington) and now presumed extinct (de Lange 2005). Not known in cultivation. First collected in the Wellington area prior to 1892.

HABITAT

Plants grew mainly in fine beach gravel and stable talus slopes between Seatoun and Point Dorset. At this site it may also have grown on cliff faces.

THREATS

The Wellington population seems to have been eliminated through a combination of habitat destruction and over collection by people. It is not clear why this species disappeared from the Waitakere Coastline.

GENUS

Lepidium



Lepidium obtusatum - probably the last gathering ever made of this species (1950).
Photographer: Ewen Cameron, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Seatoun, Wellington. Photographer: Peter J de

FAMILY

Brassicaceae

AUTHORITY

Lepidium obtusatum Kirk

SYNONYMS

None

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Plants attributed to *Lepidium obtusatum* that had been collected from the Manukau Heads are now referred to another extinct species *L. amissum* (de Lange et al. 2013).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - July

FRUITING

December - July

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Mucilaginous seeds are dispersed by attachment and possibly wind and water (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Not Applicable. However, seed obtained from a 1938/39 (exact year of collection not clear) and sown in 1993 took up water and began to germinate but then died. Possibly this experiment should be repeated but as an extinct species, seed is obviously limited.

NOTES ON ITS STATUS

Only one account of this species appearance when alive is known, and that suggests it was a very fleshy, succulent herb with dark green leaves (de Lange et al. 2013). The species appears to have always been of rather restricted occurrence and its loss seems to have been due to a combination of excessive plant collection by botanists (de Lange 2005), weed invasion and destruction of the main population as a consequence of gravel extraction (de Lange et al. 2013). There have been numerous surveys for this species in the Wellington area and it has not been seen in any of its haunts or likely habitats further afield since 1950. Indications are that it was already very uncommon localised endemic when it was discovered.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidium: Scale-shaped (pods)

obtusatum: Obtuse, or blunt

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Extinct

2012 | Extinct

2009 | Extinct

2004 | Extinct

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- de Lange, P.J. 2005. A final word from *Lepidium obtusatum*? Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 49: 7-8.
- de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Houlston, G.; Rolfe, J.R.; Mitchell, A.D. 2013: New *Lepidium* (Brassicaceae) from New Zealand. *Phytokeys* 24:1-147pp. , doi: [10.3897/phytokeys.24.4375](https://doi.org/10.3897/phytokeys.24.4375).
- Norton, D.A. and P.J. de Lange. 1999. Coastal cress (Nau) recovery plan. Threatened Species Recovery Plan 26. Department of Conservation
- 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 by P.J. de Lange: Description adapted from de Lange et al. (2013).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidium-obtusatum/>

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