Leptinella pusilla

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Yellow

Leptinella pusilla. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

Palliser Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 03/10/2009, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Dioecious, creeping, tufted perennial herb of open ground and grassland. **Rhizomes** deeply buried, pale, wiry and glabrous; branches uncommon, usually single at flowering nodes; initially clade in spirally arranged scales set 5–20 mm apart. Short shoots growing upward from buried rhizomes, each apically bearing 4-8 tufted leaves. **Roots** slender, weak, 0.5 mm diameter. **Leaves** 1-pinnatifid, 10–60 × 3–10 mm; blade 5–30 mm long, light green usually with proximal or all pinnae heavily brown-pigmented, lanceolate to obovate, submembranous, glabrous to densely villous hairy, midrib raised along most of ventral surface; pinnae 8–15 pairs, usually distant, sometimes overlapping, cut to rhachis, oblong or obovate; teeth absent or up to 8 per pinna, on distal margins only, usually obscured by hairs, cut ¼–½ across pinna, narrowly triangular, acute to acuminate, sometimes with a terminal weft of hairs. **Peduncles** villous about equal in length to leaves, 10–30 mm, ebracteate or bearing 1 simple bract. **Pistillate capitula** 2–4 mm extending to 8 mm diameter in fruit; surface convex, involucre urceolate; involucral bracts 15–30, unequally 3-, or more seriate, broadly elliptic, green, more or less villous with a broad, usually brown tipped, scarious margin; inner bracts elongated after anthesis to enclose subglobose fruiting head; florets 25–80, 2 mm long, curved, yellow-green; corolla slightly longer than wide, dentition unequal. **Staminate heads** 3–5 mm diameter; involucre hemispherical, involucral bracts 5–10, subequally uni-, or biseriate, not extending after anthesis; florets similar but slightly more numerous. **Cypsela** 1.6 × 1 mm, initially pale, chartaceous maturing brown and smooth, slightly compressed, unwrinkled.

SIMILAR TAXA
Leptinella serrulata (D.G.Lloyd) D.G.Lloyd et C.J.Webb and *L. calcarea* (D.G.Lloyd) D.G.Lloyd et C.J.Webb are closely related to *L. pusilla*. *Leptinella calcarea* differs by its rigidly stiff, fleshy leaves lacking any brown pigmentation, it is also geographically isolated from both *L. serrulata* and *L. pusilla*. *Leptinella serrulata* differs from *L. pusilla* mainly by its consistently and copiously silvery-hairy, submembranous leaves, and by the pinnae that are usually overlapping rather than distant. Furthermore, the pinnae teeth are more or less oblong rather than triangular. *L. pusilla* is frequently sympatric with *L. serrulata*. Exact distinction between both species is often not that easy and further research is needed to confirm the status of *L. serrulata*.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from the Moawhango south to Cape Palliser and the south Wellington coast), South Island (easterly from the Richmond Range (Marlborough) south to the Foveaux Strait).

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine (0–1200 m a.s.l.) but more frequent at lower elevations. Usually found in open sites on gravel, sand or in sparsely vegetated tussock grassland, or in the shade of rock outcrops.

GENUS
Leptinella

FAMILY
Asteraceae

AUTHORITY
Leptinella pusilla Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
Cotula perpusilla Hook.f., Cotula angustata G.Simpson

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August–November

FRUITING
October–January–(March)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Papery cypselae are dispersed by wind and possibly attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown and so fairly common in cultivation. However, most cultivated material is of one sex-type so seed is rarely produced. An excellent ground cover for sunny, dry sites on fre drainign soils. Once established this species is remarkably drought tolerant. Plants sold as *Cotula perpusilla* cv. Platts Black are not *L. pusilla* but *L. serrulata*.

ETYMOLOGY
leptinella: From the Greek word leptos (meaning slender, thin or delicate), referring to the ovary
pusilla: Small

NVS CODE
LEPPUS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 104

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Declining
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, PF, Sp 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

Lloyd DG. 1972. A revision of the New Zealand, Subantarctic, and South American species of *Cotula*, section *Leptinella*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 10(2)*: 277–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1972.10429156.
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 (31 August 2006). Description from Lloyd (1972) - as *Cotula perpusilla*.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/leptinella-pusilla/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026