

Pteridium esculentum

COMMON NAME

bracken, rarauhe, bracken fern

SYNONYMS

Pteridium aquilinum var. *esculentum* (G.Forst.) Kuhn

FAMILY

Dennstaedtiaceae

AUTHORITY

Pteridium esculentum (G. Forst.) Cockayne

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

NVS CODE

PTEESC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 104$

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous: New Zealand: Kermadec (Raoul Island only), North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands and Antipodes Islands. Also South East Asia, Australia, Lord Howe, Norfolk Islands extending into western Oceania.

HABITAT

Common in mainly seral habitats from the coast to the low alpine zone.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).



Wellington. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe,
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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fern with deeply rooted, subterranean rhizomes. **Stipes and rachis** chestnut brown at base, yellow-brown to russet at apex, woody, grooved, smooth, bearing sparse non-glandular hairs or ± glabrous stipe 0.2–1.3–(2.0) m or more long, 3–8–(15) mm diameter, woody. **Lamina** broadly elliptic or broadly ovate, 0.25–1.5–1.8 × 0.2–1.0–1.4 m wide, 3–4-pinnate at base, dark green (often glaucescent) above, paler beneath, adaxially glabrous, abaxially with sparse red-brown hairs on midribs and dense colourless appressed non-glandular hairs along veins. **Longest pinnae** arising at narrow angles; longest 150–650 × 80–400 mm. **Secondary pinnae** arising at narrow angles; longest 50–260 × 15–130 mm; basal one often much-reduced; midribs of primary and secondary pinnae narrowly winged. **Tertiary pinnae** decreasing markedly in length along secondary pinnae; longest 7–70 × 2–20 mm, with winged midribs. **Quaternary pinnae** to 12 × 4 mm; ultimate pinnules linear, straight, acute, entire, adnate and decurrent on 1 side. **Sori** continuous along pinna margin. **Indusium** > 0.2 mm wide, membranous, entire, glabrous. **Spores** dark yellow to orange yellow., granulose.

SIMILAR TAXA

A distinctive species which could not be confused with any other indigenous, naturalised or exotic fern present in New Zealand.

FLOWERING

None (spore bearing)

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

FRUITING

None (spore bearing)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Despite its weedy nature this species is actually surprisingly difficult to grow from spores and/or transplants of young or mature plants. Best results seem to be from plants which spontaneously arise as pot contaminants within nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

pteridium: Like Pteris; a fern known to the ancient Greeks; from the Greek pteris

esculentum: Edible; from the Latin esca and edere; in recognition of its value to the maori as a food plant

WHERE TO BUY

Rarely if ever, deliberately cultivated. Does not appear to be commercially available.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 11 January 2011. Description adapted from Brownsey (1998) and Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Brownsey PJ. 1998. Dennstaedtiaceae: *Flora of Australia* 48: 214–228.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pteridium-esculentum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pteridium-esculentum/>