

Ranunculus piliferus

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT, RR, RF

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Robust, summer-green, rhizomatous herb up to 400 mm high, forming dense patches up to 1 m across. Rhizomes numerous, stout, fleshy, 10-12 mm diameter, regularly branched, covered with the remains of sheathing petiole bases and vascular strands, with numerous long fleshy roots 2-5 mm diameter; bud scales up to 40 mm long, clasping scape and petiole, abaxial surface moderately to densely covered with pilose hairs, adaxial surface sparsely hairy to glabrate near distal part and glabrous on proximal part. Lamina 60-75 x 75-130 mm, broadly reniform or broadly orbicular in outline, subcoriaceous, adaxial surface grey or grey-green with abaxial surface paler, both surfaces sparsely pilose hairy, glabrate (rarely glabrous), moderately hairy at insertion of petiole, proximal part distinctly veined, divided into 3 primary segments, occasionally further subdivided toward base; segments weakly dissected, with few, oblong to broadly oblong, overlapping lobes, further subdivided into smaller segments with oblong to broadly oblong lobes up to 5-30 mm deep, usually planar or slightly upwardly curved near margin; margin crenate, lobes usually wider than long or of similar width and length, teeth 2-9 mm long, broadly obovate, oblong to broadly oblong, apices obtuse, margin red; petiole 50-250 x 5-9 mm, fleshy, terete; sheath 15-40 mm long, moderately to densely covered with pilose hairs. Scape 80-400 x 5-14 mm, yellow-green or green, basally flushed red, terete with 1-6 flowers, each flower subtended by a leafy bract. Bracts similar to leaves, sessile, smaller toward distal flowers. Peduncles sparsely to moderately hairy, particularly near distal part. Flowers 40-50 mm diameter.

Receptacle conical, 9.7-10.0 x 3/5-6.6 mm, often sparsely hairy and with a fringe of retrorse hairs at base, sometimes glabrous. Sepals 4-6, 20-22 x 8-11 mm, yellow-green to light green, oblong, oblong-elliptic or broadly elliptic, sometimes saccate, usually hairy on both surfaces, apex obtuse, often praemorse; nectary a simple pit. Stamens 110-139. glabrous; anthers 1.8-2.8 mm long, cream; filament 1.6-8.5 x 0.7-1.4 mm, translucent, distally tapered. Carpels 126-171 x 4.7-6.1 mm, glabrous or with a small tuft of hairs at base; stigma with minute papillae. Achenes 6.4-7.3 x 2.7-3.4 mm; body obovate, 1.8-2.5 x 1.3-1.7 mm, yellow-brown, surrounded by a wing 0.9-1.0 mm wide; beak curved to ventral side, laterally compressed, tapering toward a point at apex.



hairy leaf, Jane Peak area, Eyre Mountains, 1800m. Photographer: Rowan Hindmarsh-Walls, Licence: CC BY-NC.



hairy, Jane Peak area, Eyre Mountains, 1800m. Photographer: Rowan Hindmarsh-Walls, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA

Closest to *R. acraeus* Heenan et P.J.Lockhart from which it is distinguished by its weakly dissected, coarsely crenate rather than finely crenate leaf and bract margins, hairy rather than glabrous peduncle; by the 4-5(-6) hairy rather than only abaxially hairy sepals, and allopatric distribution. From *R. haastii* Hook.f. it differs by its much less divided, pilose-hairy rather than glabrous leaves, and allopatric distribution.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island. West Otago (Hector Mountains) and Southland (Eyre, Thomson and Takitimu Mountains, also East Dome).

HABITAT

High alpine occupying sparsely vegetated rock-slides and rock-fields derived from greywacke and non-foliated schist.

THREATS

An uncommon species common at sites within its small geographic area.

GENUS

Ranunculus

FAMILY

Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY

Ranunculus pilifer (F.J.F.Fisher) Heenan et P.J.Lockhart

SYNONYMS

Ranunculus haastii subsp. *piliferus* F.J.F.Fisher

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Ranunculus pilifer is further distinguished from both *R. haastii* and *R. acraeus* by its different nrDNA ITS and cpDNA sequences (see Heenan et al. (2006)).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November - January

FRUITING

December - February

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild

ORTHOGRAPHY NOTE

The spelling of the epithet "*pilifer*" has been varied, with "*piliferus*", and "*pilifera*" in use. However, the correct spelling is "*pilifer*" because the proper grammatical gender form is "*pilifer*" because *Ranunculus* is masculine, second declension (see [Wiktionary](#)) (Prof. Sergei Mosyakin pers. common. September 2024).

ETYMOLOGY

ranunculus: From the Latin 'rana' frog, meaning little frog and probably refers to the plants typical marshy habit where frogs abound

NVS CODE

RANPIL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 48

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR, RF

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NR, NStr, RF, RR. TL 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

Heenan, P.B; Lockhart, P.J.; Kirkham, N.; McBreen, K.; Habell, D. 2006: Relationships in the alpine *Ranunculus haastii* (Ranunculaceae) complex and recognition of *R. piliferus* and *R. acraeus* from southern New Zealand. New Zealand Journal of Botany 44(4): 425-441.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (30 October 2008). Description by P.B. Heenan based on Heenan et al. (2006).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ranunculus-piliferus/>

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