

Senecio esperensis

COMMON NAMES

L'Esperance Rock groundsel

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, DPT, EF, IE, OL

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Annual glabrous, succulent herb up to 1.2 m tall. Stem simple, occasionally branched, erect. Leaves initially petiolate toward stem base becoming sessile then auriculate, ultimately stem clasping toward stem apex; lamina up to 230 × 40mm, glossy dark green above, paler and dull beneath, succulent, oblong-spathulate, irregularly serrate to lobulate with teeth to 5mm long but never deeply pinnatifid. Inflorescence terminal with 1 or more branches. Capitula 10–12, usually widely spaced in a loose head. Involucral bracts 8–9(-13), pale green to dark green, 5–7mm long, margins scarious, apex acute. Ray florets 8–10, ligules 1.6–3.25mm long, yellow, somewhat revolute. Disc florets 4mm long. Cypsela 2.5mm long, dark brown, cylindrical, shallowly ribbed, with sparse hairs in grooves

SIMILAR TAXA

Senecio lautus is superficially similar. *S. esperensis*. *Senecio esperensis* differs from *S. lautus* by the taller stature, sparingly branched growth habit, leaves which are never as deeply pinnatifid as those of *S. lautus*, by the capitula which have fewer involucral bracts and by the sparsely hairy cypsela. *S. lautus* is endemic to the main islands of New Zealand and is not known from the Kermadec Island group. In many respects *Senecio esperensis* has a closer resemblance to *S. sterquilinus* from which it differs by its much great size, less deeply divided leaves and sparsely hairy cypsela (for more details see de Lange et al. 2015).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Kermadec Island group, known only from the summit slopes and crater of L'Esperance Rock.

HABITAT

The summit of L'Esperance Rock (also known as French Rock), where it only grows in volcanic tuff and guano deposits.

THREATS

The only known habitat is a nature reserve remote from main shipping routes so the rock is rarely visited. For emergency purposes the summit of the island was used as a fuel dump for rescue helicopters. Ironically there is where the *Senecio* mainly grows. In May 2011 a visit to L'Esperance by Department of Conservation staff found the *Senecio* to be locally common, they also found no sign of the helicopter platform or fuel dump - these appeared to have been washed away by Cyclone Bune which struck the Kermadec Islands in March 2011 (de Lange 2015). *Senecio esperensis* qualifies as Nationally Critical because of its small area of occupancy (de Lange 2015 (as *S. lautus* subsp. *esperensis*) and de Lange et al. 2015).



Capitulum. In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 15/10/2011, Licence: CC BY.



Cauline leaf. In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 15/10/2011, Licence: CC BY.

GENUS

Senecio

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Senecio esperensis (Sykes) de Lange

SYNONYMS

Senecio lautus subsp. lautus var. esperensis Sykes, Senecio lautus var. esperensis Sykes; Senecio lautus subsp. esperensis (Sykes) de Lange

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Senecio esperensis was originally described as a variety of *S. lautus* (Sykes 1971) and then it was elevated to subspecies rank by de Lange et al. (2010). However, on further study using wild collected and cultivated plants it became evident that this plant is worthy of species rank (de Lange 2015) and as such the necessary combination at that rank has now been made (de Lange et al. 2015).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - October (depending on local conditions)

FRUITING

September to December (depending on local conditions)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed, however, plants cultivated in Auckland in 2011 all died at the onset of flowering from *Phytophthora* (de Lange 2015).

ETYMOLOGY

senecio: From the Latin senex 'old man' (probably referring to the bearded seeds)

NVS CODE

SENESP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, DP, EF, IE, OL

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, EF, IE, OL

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: OL, EF, IE, DP

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- de Lange PJ 2015. The flora and vegetation of L'Esperance Rock, southern Kermadec Islands group. *Auckland Museum Bulletin* 20: 231–242.
- de Lange in: de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Norton, D.A.; Rolfe, J.R.; Sawyer, J.W.D. 2010: Threatened Plants of New Zealand. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch.
- de Lange, P.J.; Liew, C.S.; Rolfe, J.R.; Pelter, P.B. 2015: *Senecio esperensis* (Asteraceae: Senecioneae)—a new combination for the L'Esperance Rock groundsel, Kermadec Islands. *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, DOI: 10.1080/0028825X.2015.1039552
- Sykes, W. R. 1971: *Senecio lautus* in the Kermadec Islands. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 9: 533–538.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange 11 November 2008. Description from de Lange et al. (2015)

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/senecio-esperensis/>

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