

Acaena tesca

COMMON NAMES

bidibid, piripiri

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

An evergreen glaucous herb, which grows in loose mats less than a 1/2 metre across amongst other vegetation, about 2 cm in height. The pinnate leaves are delicate, obviously veined on the upper surface and blunt-toothed, and hair tipped, the furthest leaflets being larger, the margin may discolour to purple. The stemless flowers are white in bloom and grow into a cluster of noticeable red hair tipped spikes, which when ripening become light brown or cream coloured.

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Low-growing or mat-forming suffruticose perennial, with dark brown subterranean **stems** up to 2.5 mm diameter. Long shoots prostrate, rooting at nodes, c.10 cm long with internodes c.10 mm long; short shoots erect, c.20 mm long, c.1 mm diameter, pale brown, sparsely hairy. **Leaves** imbricate on short shoots, imparipinnate, 10–50 × 5–10 mm. **Stipules** 3–4 mm long, with margins and tips hairy, and free portion c.1 mm long, entire, triangular. **Leaflets** 3–5 pairs, gradually reduced in size to base of rachis, broad obovate or orbicular in outline, 2.5–5.0 × 2.5–4.0 mm, truncate at apex or slightly emarginate; upper surface glaucous, with sparse to moderately dense appressed hairs, and indistinct veins; lower surface glaucous, with appressed hairs on veins; teeth 6–9, dull red with pink hydathode area at tip, weakly penicillate. Hair simple, unicellular, 0.2–0.8 mm long, on stipules, rachis and leaflets. **Capitulum** terminating short shoot, sessile, subtended by several leafy bracts, 5–8 mm diameter at flowering, 25–35 mm diameter (including spines) at fruiting. Bracteoles on receptacle linear-lanceolate, c.2 mm long, with hairy margins. Florets c. 10, very shortly stipitate. Hypanthium c.1.5 × 1.5 mm, enclosing perigynous ovary, sparsely hairy, with 4 very short spines inserted third-way from apex. Sepals 4, arising from hypanthium rim, free or shortly joined at base, 1.5 mm long, ovate, thickened at tip, hairy below. Petals 0. Stamens 2–3; filaments up to 2.5 mm long; anthers 0.5 × 0.6 mm, white. Styles 2, 2.5 mm long including stigma; stigma white, fimbriate, 1 mm broad, protruding from aperture of hypanthium. **Fruit** indehiscent; achenes 2, enclosed in the hypanthium; hypanthium turbinate, c.2.5 × 2.0 mm, red-brown, 4-ribbed, sparsely hairy; spines 4, 5–20 mm long, red, softly sparsely hairy, at least when young, with a group of retrorse hairs at tip.



Growing with *Agrostis capillaris*. Photographer: Kelvin Lloyd, Licence: All rights reserved.



Old Woman Range. Photographer: Kelvin Lloyd, Licence: All rights reserved.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *A. b Buchananii* which differs from *A. tesca* by its lower altitudinal range, more compact growth habit, densely tufted leafy stems and pale milky green or grey foliage (rather than glaucous). *Acaena b Buchananii* has 5-6 imbricate cf. 3-5 pairs of basally remote leaflets, while the capitula of *A. b Buchananii* is compressed with spines held erect, rather than the loose ball and divergent spines typical of *A. tesca*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: **South Island**, Mackenzie Basin, Central Otago and northern Southland - Crown, Pisa, Dunstan, Ida, Old Woman, and Old Man Ranges, Garvie and Umbrella Mountains.

HABITAT

Subalpine to alpine (800-1500 m.a.s.l.). In *Chionochloa* tussock grassland, around rock outcrops and between tussocks; also in induced *Poa colensoi* herbfield; herbfield close to seepages, and in fellfield.

THREATS

A Naturally Uncommon, sparsely distributed species which is at times locally abundant. There are no known threats.

GENUS

Acaena

FAMILY

Rosaceae

AUTHORITY

Acaena tesca B.H.Macmill.

SYNONYMS

None (described in 1991)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

January.

FRUITING

February-March.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and from rooted pieces.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

acaena: From the Greek 'akanthos' thorn, referring to the spiny calyx that many species have

tesca: (Plural) From the Latin term for 'wild places' referring to the wild places in which this species grows.

NVS CODE

ACATES

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NStr, RE, Sp, 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

Macmillan, B.H. 1991: *Acaena rorida* and *Acaena tesca* (Rosaceae) - two new species from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 29: 131-138.

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* 2009 Vol. 11 No. 4 pp. 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Macmillan (1991).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/acaena-tesca/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026