Ranunculus piliferus

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

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 glabriate 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
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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).

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ranunculus-piliferus/

PDF DATE
25 August 2026