

Alsophila dealbata

COMMON NAMES

silver fern, ponga

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Tree fern with green-stalked soft leaves to 4 m long that are distinctly silver on the underside. Trunk to 10 m tall, covered by the bases of old fronds. Leaf stems covered in wavy hairs (lens needed). Sporangia arranged in small round capsules underneath leaves.

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tree fern up to 10 m tall (very rarely without trunk). **Trunk** covered in long-persistent, peg-like, stipe bases. **Stipes** slender, silvery-white when young, maturing pale brown. Harsh to the touch, covered in pale-brown scales. **Scales** without marginal spines. **Fronds** up to 4 m long, horizontal, somewhat arching, 3-pinnate. Dead fronds falling. **Longest primary pinnae** 300–550 mm, pale green above, white below (very rarely pale green) below. Under surfaces sparingly clad in curly hairs. **Indusia** covering sori at maturity, opening at maturity to form a deep cup with a smooth rim.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinctive. In New Zealand *Alsophila dealbata* could only be confused with the Raoul Island (Kermadec Islands) endemic *A. milnei* which is occasionally cultivated on the New Zealand mainland. *A. milnei* is easily recognised by the pale green rather than white frond under surfaces, and by the persistent skirt of dead fronds. It is rather cold sensitive. Some populations of *Alsophila dealbata* at Te Pahi (and less commonly elsewhere in northern New Zealand) are distinctive because their fronds have pale grey rather than silvery white under sides and often these plants have a creeping, trunk less (or nearly trunk less) habit. Their status needs further investigation, especially as this form can be found at Te Pahi growing alongside *A. dealbata* plants with a well defined trunk and silvery-white frond under sides. The Te Pahi form retains its trunk less (or short trunk) and pale grey frond undersides in cultivation. It is very slow growing.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands south to Mahers Swamp in the west and Dunedin in the east of the South Island.



Sori, Wellington. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 15/11/1986, Licence: CC BY.



Emerging fronds. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/11/1981, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT

Common, primarily coastal and lowland habitats but extending to lower montane. Preferring dry forest and shrubland, often under pines.

THREATS

Not threatened—widespread and common through most of its range and often seen in urban vegetation. Probably one of the most common, if not the most common, indigenous tree ferns.

GENUS

Alsophila

FAMILY

Cyatheaceae

AUTHORITY

Alsophila dealbata (G.Forst.) Corda

SYNONYMS

Cyathea dealbata (G.Forst.) Sw.; *Cyathea dealbata* var. *tricolor* (Colenso) Domin; *Cyathea tricolor* Colenso; *Polypodium dealbatum* G.Forst.; *Alsophila tricolor* (Colenso) R.M.Tryon

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Alsophila tricolor (Colenso) R.M.Tryon was long considered the correct name for *Cyathea dealbata* (G.Forst.) Sw. in *Alsophila*. This is because the epithet "*dealbata*" is preoccupied in *Alsophila* by *A. dealbata* C.Presl described in 1848, and now treated as a synonym of *Sphaeropteris glauca* (Blume) R.M.Tryon. However, recently (2025) it has been shown that an earlier combination in *Alsophila*, *A. dealbata* (G.Forst.) Corda has priority over *A. dealbata* C.Presl. (see: <https://www.ipni.org/n/77360609-1>) which is now treated as an illegitimate later homonym.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Not applicable—spore producing

FRUITING

Not applicable—spore producing

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Can be grown from fresh spores (but slow). Young plants transplant easily and freshly felled trunks will usually resprout if planted and carefully watered. Easy, once established in a variety of conditions. Should not be removed from the wild unless with the landowners permission.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION

Sold by most commercial nurseries. Commonly cultivated.

ETYMOLOGY

dealbata: Whitened

NVS CODE

ALSTRI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 138, 144

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland](#)" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange March 2004. Description adapted from Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/alsophila-dealbata/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026