

Cheilanthes distans

COMMON NAMES

woolly cloak fern, woolly rock fern

BIOSTATUS

Native

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rupestal (rarely terrestrial) fern. **Fron**ds up to 350 × 30 mm; stipe red-brown or dark brown, with moderately dense to dense covering of brown scales and some hairs, rachis densely covered in scales. **Lamina** linear, 2-pinnate or 2-pinnatifid at base and for most of length; large pinnae triangular-ovate; pinnules oblong- elliptic; margins entire or lobed; adaxially sparsely to moderately densely covered with slender, white hairs and occasional caducous scales, very rarely glabrous; abaxially sparsely to densely covered in scales and sparse white hairs. **Spores** spherical, granulose and ridged, with echinate ornamentation, 43–79 µm diameter, 16 per sporangium.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *Cheilanthes sieberi* subsp. *sieberi* with which it often grows by the the stipes, rachises and primary pinnae being copiously covered in scales and hairs rather than glabrous (or nearly so).

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Kermadec Islands (Macauley Island). Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island, South Island (mainly easterly south to Banks Peninsula). Also Australia and New Caledonia.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane in dry, rocky habitats with only sparse or no vegetation cover. Often found growing with *Asplenium flabellifolium*, *Cheilanthes sieberi* subsp. *sieberi* and *Pellaea calidirupium*. More common in the drier eastern parts of the country.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

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DETAILED TAXONOMY

GENUS

Cheilanthes

FAMILY

Pteridaceae

AUTHORITY

Cheilanthes distans (R.Br.) Mett.

SYNONYMS

Notholaena distans R.Br.



Kennedy Bay, October. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Mangatoetoe Stream, Aorangi Forest Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/10/2010, Licence: CC BY.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute spores are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a dry sunny site. An excellent pot plant. In ideal conditions it soon self establishes.

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

cheilanthes: From the Greek kheilos 'lip' and anthos 'flower', referring to the indusium

distans: Distant (widely spaced female flowers)

NVS CODE

CHEDIS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 116

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPT, RR, SO 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.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Chambers TC, Farrant PA. 1998. *Cheilanthes*. [Flora of Australia 48, Ferns Gymnosperms and allied groups](#): 271–286. ABRS/CSIRO Victoria, Australia.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (Updated 3 May 2011). Adapted from Chambers & Farrant (1998)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cheilanthes-distans/>

PDF DATE

22 September 2025