

# Pteridium esculentum

## COMMON NAMES

bracken, rarauhe, bracken fern

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

## FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fern with deeply rooted, subterranean rhizomes. **Stipes and rachis** chestnut brown at base, yellow-brown to russet at apex, woody, grooved, smooth, bearing sparse non-glandular hairs or  $\pm$  glabrous stipe 0.2–1.3–(2.0) m or more long, 3–8–(15) mm diameter, woody. **Lamina** broadly elliptic or broadly ovate, 0.25–1.5–1.8  $\times$  0.2–1.0–1.4 m wide, 3–4-pinnate at base, dark green (often glaucescent) above, paler beneath, adaxially glabrous, abaxially with sparse red-brown hairs on midribs and dense colourless appressed non-glandular hairs along veins. **Longest pinnae** arising at narrow angles; longest 150–650  $\times$  80–400 mm. **Secondary pinnae** arising at narrow angles; longest 50–260  $\times$  15–130 mm; basal one often much-reduced; midribs of primary and secondary pinnae narrowly winged. **Tertiary pinnae** decreasing markedly in length along secondary pinnae; longest 7–70  $\times$  2–20 mm, with winged midribs. **Quaternary pinnae** to 12  $\times$  4 mm; ultimate pinnules linear, straight, acute, entire, adnate and decurrent on 1 side. **Sori** continuous along pinna margin. **Indusium**  $>$  0.2 mm wide, membranous, entire, glabrous. **Spores** dark yellow to orange yellow., granulose.

## SIMILAR TAXA

A distinctive species which could not be confused with any other indigenous, naturalised or exotic fern present in New Zealand.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous: New Zealand: Kermadec (Raoul Island only), North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands and Antipodes Islands. Also South East Asia, Australia, Lord Howe, Norfolk Islands extending into western Oceania.

## HABITAT

Common in mainly seral habitats from the coast to the low alpine zone.

## GENUS

Pteridium

## FAMILY

Dennstaedtiaceae

## AUTHORITY

Pteridium esculentum (G. Forst.) Cockayne



Lake Hawea. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Catlins, December. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

## SYNONYMS

*Pteridium aquilinum* var. *esculentum* (G.Forst.) Kuhn

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

None (spore bearing)

## FRUITING

None (spore bearing)

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Despite its weedy nature this species is actually surprisingly difficult to grow from spores and/or transplants of young or mature plants. Best results seem to be from plants which spontaneously arise as pot contaminants within nurseries.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

## CULTIVATION

Rarely if ever, deliberately cultivated. Does not appear to be commercially available.

## PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for August 2017](#) for the full story.

## ETYMOLOGY

**pteridium:** Like Pteris; a fern known to the ancient Greeks; from the Greek pteris

**esculentum:** Edible; from the Latin esca and edere; in recognition of its value to the maori as a food plant

## NVS CODE

PTEESC

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 104

## 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 | 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. 1998. Dennstaedtiaceae: *Flora of Australia* 48: 214–228.

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 11 January 2011. Description adapted from Brownsey (1998) and Brownsey & Smith-Dodsworth (2000).

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Pteridium esculentum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pteridium-esculentum/> (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pteridium-esculentum/>

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026