

Asplenium bulbiferum

COMMON NAME

hen and chicken fern, pikopiko, mother spleenwort

SYNONYMS

Asplenium marinum var. *bulbifera* (G.Forst.) F.Muell.; *Caenopteris bulbifera* (G.Forst.) Desv.;

FAMILY

Aspleniaceae

AUTHORITY

Asplenium bulbiferum G. Forst.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

NVS CODE

ASPBUL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 144

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. Usually in lowland forest where it is a common species of the ground-layer, especially in high rainfall areas. Commonly associated with riparian forest, and as a species of base-rich substrates. Frequently sympatric and so commonly forming hybrids with other asplenias. It is commonly sympatric with *A. gracillimum* Colenso.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

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



Sorus. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/02/1981, Licence: CC BY.



Waipoua. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 11/12/1982, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rhizome short, stout, erect, bearing ovate scales up to 15 × 5 mm. **Stipes** 50–300 mm long, brown on underside, green above, stout, covered in small brown ovate scales. **Laminae** lanceolate to elliptic, 0.15–1.20 m, 70–300 mm, bi- to tripinnate, sometimes bearing bulbils. **Raches** pale green to yellow-green, scaly, prominently grooved. **Pinnae** 15–30 (or more) pairs, ovate to narrowly ovate, acuminate, shortly stalked, 30–200 × 10–50 mm, scaly on underside, basal pair pointing downwards when fresh. **Secondary pinnae** sessile or shortly stalked, very narrowly elliptic to ovate or elliptic, obtuse, deeply serrate or sometimes almost pinnate, decreasing in size from base to apex, basal acroscopic pinnule often enlarged (up to 40 × 10 mm). **Ultimate pinnules** narrowly oblong, ± entire to crenate-serrate, up to 10 mm long. **Sori** numerous, broad, submarginal, 2–4 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Asplenium bulbiferum, the world famous hen & chicken fern is only ever likely to be confused with the closely related *A. gracillimum*. From that species it is distinguished by its usually bulbiferous; mostly pale green fronds and ovate stipe scales which lack long filiform apices. *Asplenium bulbiferum* is a tetraploid (2n = 144) and *A. gracillimum* an octoploid (2n = 288), so hybrids between these two species are sterile.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown, and popular in cultivation. However, most plants sold as this species are the sterile hybrid *A. x lucrosum* Perrie et Brownsey (*A. bulbiferum* × *A. dimorphum* Kunze). An excellent pot plant but as with all asplenia prone to infestations of scale and mealy bugs.

ETYMOLOGY

asplenium: From the Greek a- 'without' and splene 'spleen', a northern hemisphere species, the black spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*), was once believed to be a cure for diseases of the spleen.

bulbiferum: Bearing bulbils or bulbs

WHERE TO BUY

Commonly sold by many plant nurseries. However some plants sold as this species are in fact a sterile hybrid *A. x lucrosum* (*A. bulbiferum* × *A. dimorphum*).

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (3 February 2005). Description from: Brownsey (1977)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Brownsey P.J. 1977. A taxonomic revision of the New Zealand species of *Asplenium*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 15(1): 39–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1977.10429618>.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/asplenium-bulbiferum/>