

Dracophyllum elegantissimum

COMMON NAME

grass tree, slender dragon tree

SYNONYMS

None

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum elegantissimum S.Venter

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

DRAELE

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Single-stemmed, grass tree up to 14 m tall, branch terminals bearing tufts of long, narrow leaves with curled ends. Flowers pink, borne in terminal panicles, these often obscured by leaves

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (westerly from Nelson to northern Westland)

HABITAT

Lowland to upper montane (160–980 m a.s.l.). A species of forest communities overlying granodiorite, calcareous sandstone and conglomerate, or limestone. All the known populations occur on gentle to steep (5–45°) south-west to north-west-facing mountain slopes.



Dracophyllum elegantissimum juvenile, Campbell Creek. Photographer: Simon Walls, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Dracophyllum elegantissimum adult, Campbell Creek. Photographer: Simon Walls, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tree 5–14 m tall with a single stem. Branches form a closed candelabrum-shaped crown. Bark on old stems light brown and flaky, on branchlets glabrous and yellowish brown. Leaves crowded at tips of branches in a bromelioid manner, old leaves sometimes present; lamina sheath light brown, 22–58 x 13–43 mm, coriaceous, striate, margin not membranous, shoulder tapering with a smooth margin; lamina coriaceous, light to mid green, linear to linear-triangular, 330–1000 x 10–20 (–32) mm, glabrous, prominently striated; margin cartilaginous, serrulate with 15–24 teeth per 10 mm; apex acute and prominently curled. Inflorescence a terminal panicle, shorter than the leaves, erect, dense, 190–320 mm long, pyramidal, densely branched; rachis and pedicels tomentose; inflorescence axis light green, 10.6–14.0 mm diam. at base; basal inflorescence branch 38–42(–55) mm long, widely spreading (50–90°); inflorescence bracts caducous, longer than flower, coriaceous, light green, ovate-triangular at base, 270–610 x 30–45 mm, glabrous; margin entire; apex acute. Flowers 600–1000 or more, arranged in groups of >10 on the basal inflorescence branches; bracteole caducous, shorter than flower, linear 2.0–8.0 x 0.5–1.5 mm, glabrous; pedicel straight, green, 0.5–2.0 mm long, tomentose. Sepals green, broadly ovate, 1–2 x 1.0–1.5 mm, shorter than corolla tube, striate, glabrous; margin ciliate; apex subacute to obtuse. Corolla light to dark pink; corolla tube campanulate, widened at mouth, 1.0–2.0 x 1.3–2.0 mm, exterior glabrous; corolla lobes spreading horizontally to reflexed, ovate-triangular, shorter than corolla tube, 1.2–1.4 x 1.0–1.3 mm; glabrous, apex obtuse. Stamens inserted at top of corolla tube; filament 0.3–0.5 mm long; anthers exserted, rectangular, young anthers pink, deep yellow when mature, 0.9–1.3 mm long. Ovary globose, 1.0–1.5 x 1.3–1.5 mm; apex tapering and glabrous; nectary scales separate, rectangular, 0.6–1.0 x 0.5–1.0 mm, apices subacute to irregularly toothed; style exserted, 1.5–1.7 mm long, glabrous, lengthening in fruit; stigma clavate. Fruit not enclosed in persistent sepals, reddish brown, 1.2–1.5 x 1.5–1.8 mm, depressed-globose; apex round and glabrous. Seed yellowish brown, filiform, 0.7–0.8 mm long with a slightly reticulated testa.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Dracophyllum traversii* from which it differs by the longer, narrower leaves with curled apices; longer inflorescence bracts; sepals and corolla lobes that are shorter than the corolla tube; smaller nectary scales with toothed margins; and smaller ovary. From *Dracophyllum latifolium* it is distinguished by the longer inflorescence bracts; smaller corolla tube; corolla lobes that are shorter than the corolla tube; shorter filaments; narrower nectary scales and smaller ovary.

FLOWERING

December - February

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

FRUITING

February - March

LIFE CYCLE

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult - should not be removed from the wild

ETYMOLOGY

dracophyllum: Dragon leaf, from its likeness to the dragon tree of the Canary Islands

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (29 March 2008). Description adapted from Venter (2007)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Venter, S. 2007: *Dracophyllum elegantissimum* (Ericaceae), a new species from north-west Nelson, New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 42: 37–43.

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/dracophyllum-elegantissimum/>