Sticherus urceolatus

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FAMILY: Gleicheniaceae

BOTANICAL NAME: *Sticherus urceolatus*

COMMON NAME: umbrella fanfern

CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE:
None recorded

Description

Umbrella fanfern is a terrestrial fern that forms scrambling thickets. It has a dark brown to black underground stem (rhizome) which is 4 mm thick, long and creeping, with light brown to reddish fringed scales that are partially pressed against it. The fronds are stiff and erect, up to 90 cm in length and arising up to 50 mm apart along the rhizome. The lower frond stem (stipe) is black at the base, brown or green in the upper section and hairless, although there are stem-hugging scales (similar to those on the rhizome) on the stipe base.

The upper frond stem (rachis) is sparsely covered in brown, narrow, heavily-fringed scales and the front surface is light to dark brown. The rachis bud is situated between paired primary divisions. The bud and the bottom part of the new rachis growth bears light or reddish brown fringed scales.

The leafy part of the frond (lamina) is fan-shaped, with paired primary divisions (pinnae) at the stipe apex, and up to 4 annual increments of growth arise from the rachis bud. The lamina appears to be forked (pseudo-dichotomous) up to 4 times, with a dormant bud between each pinnae that rarely develops. The angle between the first few pinnae is 45–75°, and the ultimate division is 6–13 times the length of the first division, lance-shaped and sometimes with a tail-like tip. The pinnae are usually variable in size and coverage. The secondary lamina divisions (pinnules) arise at an angle of 50–75° to the rachis, are stalkless (sessile) and broadened at the base, with either a blunt or sharp tip, and have entire or slightly round-toothed (crenate) margins.

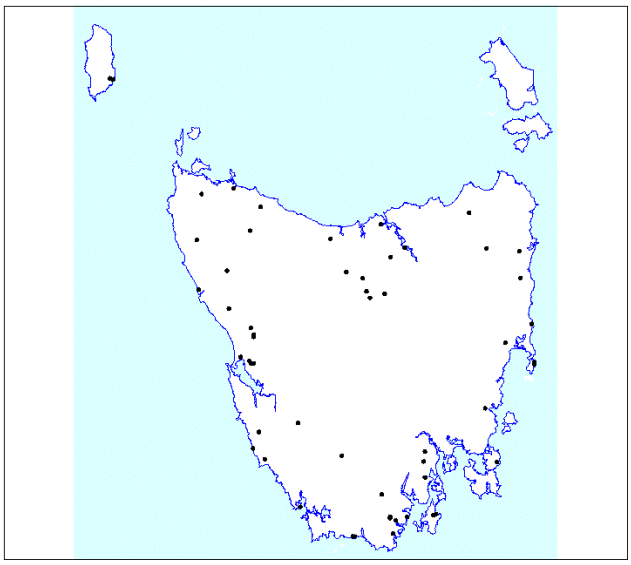
The spore clusters (sori) have no cover and each consists of 3–5 large sporangia containing yellow spores. The spore clusters form a single row either side of the mid-vein of the pinnules and are situated halfway between the mid-vein and the margin on one branch of a forked veinlet. They are mostly absent from the ends of the pinnules and the last (ultimate) pinna.

This is a relatively new species that has been recently described.

Confusing species

Sticherus urceolatus is very similar in appearance to other *Sticherus* species. They can be distinguished from each other by the size of the angle between the first rachis divisions (pinnae), along with the angle at which the pinnules of the last branch division are attached to the rachis. Also important are the types of scales and the presence or absence of hairs on the lower surface of the leafy divisions and, where present, the types of hairs on the lower surface of the leafy divisions.

Distribution and Habitat



Distribution of *Sticherus urceolatus* in Tasmania 2004 data.

The habitat and distribution of *Sticherus urceolatus* are similar to *Sticherus tener*. Given this species was only described in 1998, these records cover few years of field observations. It is likely that many of the records previously allocated to *S. tener* were *S. urceolatus.* Thus the current distribution records of *S. urceolatus* are not a very accurate indication of the full extent of its distribution.

Ecology

Since *Sticherus urceolatus* has only been recently described, there is little information available on this species. However, it can be presumed that its ecology is very similar to *Sticherus tener*, given these species occupy similar habitats.

Sticherus urceolatus can reproduce rapidly vegetatively via the creeping rhizome, accounting for its ability to form vigorous scrambling thickets.

Potential for Cultivation

It is likely this species, like *Sticherus tener*, has a high potential for cultivation, especially when considering that any fern with a creeping rhizome such as this one can be propagated successfully by division.

Information Sources

Garrett, M., Kantvilas, G. & Laws, H. (1998) *Sticherus urceolatus* (Gleicheniaceae), a new fern species from southern Australia. *Muelleria*. 11, 101–111.

Understorey Network. Tasmanian Native Species Database. www.understorey-network.org.au