Produced by Olaf Booy, Max Wade and Vicky White of RPS

New Zealand Pigmyweed

Species Description

Scientific name: *Crassula helmsii*
AKA: *Tillaea aquatica*, Australian Swamp-stonecrop, Briweg Seland Newydd (Welsh), *Tillaea recurva*
Native to: Australia and New Zealand
Habitat: Aquatic up to 3m deep in still or slow flowing water bodies or terrestrial around pond or lake margins

Can be submerged, emergent and terrestrial. Readily recognisable when growing at the edges of water bodies by its fleshy leaves. Submerged leaves are less easy to see and recognise. Reproduces from very small stem fragments but does not produce viable seed in the UK.

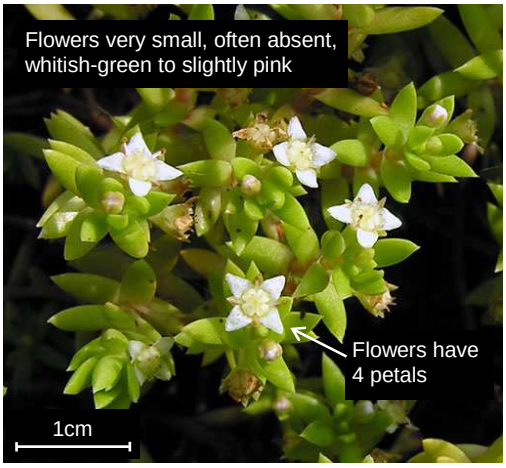
Introduced in 1911 as an oxygenating plant for ponds and, since the 1970s, has spread rapidly. Forms dense mats and can impede drainage, causing flooding. Displaces other aquatic plant species and reduces amenity use of the waterbody.

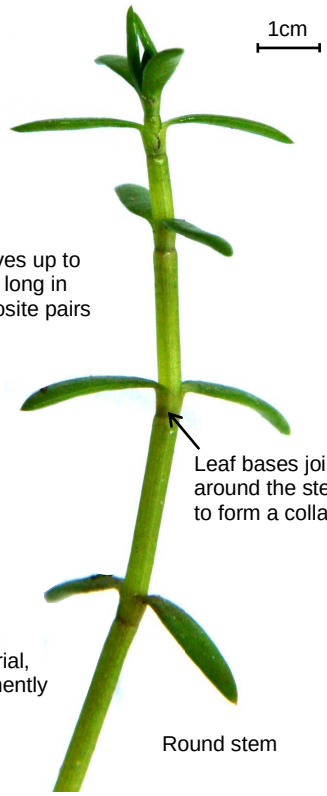
New Zealand Pigmyweed is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause this species to grow in the wild.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.

Key ID Features

Forms dense mats within the water body





Identification of terrestrial, emergent and submerged forms

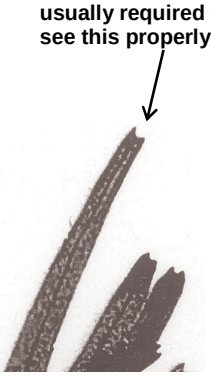
Terrestrial: Growing away from the water's edge or left stranded as water level falls, creeping stems and aerial, fleshy leaves.

Emergent: Densely packed leaves in water, intermediate between terrestrial and submerged form (occurs in water <0.6m deep).

Submerged: Elongated stems with leaves sparse and flat, able to form extensive mats on bed of the water body.

Similar Species

A group of species known as water-starworts are most likely to be confused with New Zealand pigmyweed. Water-starworts are distinguished from New Zealand pigmyweed by their non-fleshy leaves, which are usually notched at the tip (hold up to light or use hand lens), and lack of collar at leaf base.



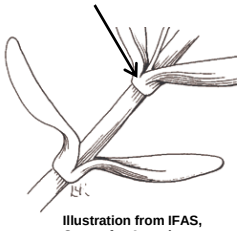


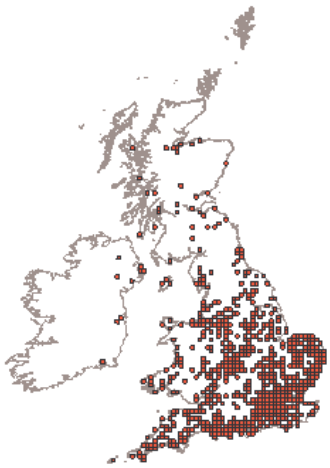
Illustration from IFAS, Centre for Aquatic Plants, University of Florida, Gainesville 1990

Fleshy leaves without notched tips

Distribution

Widespread in England and Wales. Spreading northwards, though much less common in Scotland. Very common in the south-east of England.

Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution.



References and further reading:

Blamey, M, Fitter, R and Fitter, A (2003) *"The Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland. The Complete Guide to the British and Irish Flora."* A & C Black

Preston, C D and Croft, J M (1997) *"Aquatic plants in Britain and Ireland".* Harley Books

Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) *"New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora".* Oxford University Press

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Photos from: Olaf Booy, Richard Lansdown (RL), Peter Llewellyn, Max Wade