

Althenia bilocularis

SYNONYMS

Lepilaena bilocularis Kirk

FAMILY

Potamogetonaceae

AUTHORITY

Althenia bilocularis (Kirk) Cockayne

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

NVS CODE

LEPBIL

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: EF, RR, SO, Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: RR, SO, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: SO

2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Known from North, South and Chatham Islands. Also present in Australia.

HABITAT

Aquatic herb of lakes, brackish water, or slow-flowing rivers. Usually found in shallow fresh water habitats not far from the coast.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

FEATURES

Annual, summer-green, submerged, rhizomatous herb forming small patches. Stems up to 20 cm long, thread-like, usually unbranched. Internodes 1-4 cm long. Leaves regularly alternate, leaf-base at first sheathing stem, to 4 mm long, becoming fibrous with age, leaf-blade 2.5-3.5 x 1 mm, entire, 1- or 3- nerved, with nerves extending to the squarely truncate tip. Flower enclosed within leaf-bases. Both sexes in separate positions on the same plant. Male on small 5 mm stalk (pedicel), stamen solitary, anther 2 x 0.6 mm, sickle-shaped, with 2 pollen sacs. Female shortly stalked (pedicellate), perianth-segments narrow-oblong, lacerate, 1.5 x 0.5 mm. Carpels 3(-4), style narrower than ovary, stigma funnel-shaped with long feathery margins. Seed (achene) 1.5-2 x 0.5 mm., asymmetrically oblong, yellow, smooth, narrowing above to style remnant c. 1 mm long.



SIMILAR TAXA

Althenia is most likely to be confused with *Zannichellia palustris* which is a superficially similar indigenous aquatic herb of much the same habitats. *Zannichellia* differs from *Althenia* by its much-branched floating habit, in having leaves arranged in false whorls of 3-4, and by the flowers arranged together within the sheathing bracts. Submerged plants of *Schoenus maschalinus* (Cyperaceae) are also superficially similar, but these are much branched, and will not flower when submerged.

FLOWERING

Flowers can be present throughout the year

FRUITING

Fruit can be present throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

No information available.

THREATS

As the result of field surveys it is clear that *Althenia bilocularis* is biologically sparse in its distribution. In the northern part of its range it seems to have been especially uncommon and there more than anywhere else is where it has undergone some range contraction. However, that loss is insufficient to justify its listing as Threatened.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Althenia bilocularis was initially placed in the genus *Lepilaena*, as *L. bilocularis* by Thomas Kirk who discovered it and described it (Kirk 1896). Later Cockayne (1927) placed *Lepilaena bilocularis* in *Althenia*, a decision that was not followed by Moore & Edgar (1970). Subsequently using a combination of molecular and morphological data Ito et al. (2016) confirmed the opinion of Cockayne (1927) and resurrected his combination in *Althenia* and this is followed here.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007: Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cockayne, L.C. in Speight, R., Wall, A. & Laing, R.M. (ed.) 1927: Ecological botany of the Canterbury Plains. *Natural History of Canterbury*: 126

Ito, Y.; Tanaka, N.; García-Murillo, P.; Muasya, A.M. 2016: A new delimitation of the Afro-Eurasian plant genus *Althenia* to include its Australasian relative, *Lepilaena* (Potamogetonaceae)—evidence from DNA and morphological data. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 98: 261-270.

Kirk, T. 1896: Art. LII: Notes on Certain Veronicas, and descriptions of new species. *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 28: 500.

Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. II. Government Printer, Wellington.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/althenia-bilocularis/>