Aponogeton distachyos

COMMON NAMES
Cape pondweed

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Monocots

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Bottom rooted perennial aquatic plants that grows in water up to 1.2m deep with floating oval dark green leaves and attractive and fragrant flowers with white petals that extend above the water surface. Plants also have submerged leaves and large tuberous rootstock.

Flowers of Aponogeton distachyos. Photographer: Rohan Wells, Date taken: 19/05/2008, Licence: All rights reserved.

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Cape pondweed has a basal globose (nearly spherical) tuber, 3-4 cm in diameter. Floating leaves are basal, pale to dark green, up to 25 cm long, narrow-lanceolate in shape, and with many distinctive cross veins. Submerged leaves are linear in shape. The tuberous rootstock has a ring of long soft roots and fibrous remains from petioles. Flowers are on a two-forked spike with fleshy white lobes and are very fragrant. The terminal spikes (ca 6 cm long) protrude above the water and have a tubular spathe that sheaths the infloresence and falls off at an early stage . Flowers are sessile (no stem) in two rows and fragment at the base of the bract-like extensions of the spike axis. These bract-like extensions enlarge (ca 1cm) and become reddish at fruiting. Seeds are ca 9 mm long with a green spongy outer testa. Seedlings have terete/circular leaves and proressively acquire minature oblong leaves. When only a few centimetres high the seedling develops its characteristic basal tuber, and the testa remains attached to the seedling for a considerable period.

Flowers and foliage of Aponogeton distachyos. Photographer: Rohan Wells, Date taken: 19/05/2008, Licence: All rights reserved.

SIMILAR TAXA
Swamp lily (Ottelia ovalifolia). Swamp lily has fibrous roots compared with the tuberous rootstock of Cape pondweed. Swamp lily floating leaves are less elongated, with pronounced dark green venation and flowers are three-petalled.

DISTRIBUTION
Widely naturalised, though apparently lost from some northern sites. Some locally abundant populations in coastal and lowland NI localities. Occurs in SI at Blenheim in Marlborough, in some lakes in Canterbury and Westland, near Dunedin and near Lake Te Anau.

HABITAT
Still and flowing water bodies.

GENUS
Aponogeton

FAMILY
Aponogetonaceae

AUTHORITY
Aponogeton distachyos L.f.

SYNONYMS
Aponogeton distachyus

FLOWERING
Predominantly Decemeber, but spring to autumn.

FRUITING
Autumn

YEAR NATURALISED
1870

ORIGIN
South Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Probably planted as an ornamental because of its attractive, fragrant flowers.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Can be controlled manually, mechanically or herbicidally depending on situation.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seeds prolifically, seeds water dispersed. Ripe fruit can float for a short time before release of the negatively buoyant seeds and in flowing water the plant can be dispersed over considerable distance.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
aponogeton: From the Celtic apon ‘water’ and ‘geiton’ neighbour. An alternative etymology is that this word is from the Greek a- ‘without’ or ‘lacking’ and ge ‘earth, i.e. aquatic
distachyos: From the Greek dis ‘two’ and takeon ‘spike’, in reference to the V-shaped flower spike.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE
APODIS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication. http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species.

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. ; DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Cente. 65pp.

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Johnson, A. T., Smith, H. A. (1972). Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd: Buckenhill, UK.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aponogeton-distachyos/

PDF DATE

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