

# Bulbinella modesta

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)



## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

## FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Summer green herb. Plants very slender, < or = 300 mm. **Leaves** bright green, < 10 mm wide, flaccid, linear-lanceolate, gradually tapering to a subacute apex. **Inflorescence** a somewhat short and broad raceme, bearing scattered, well spaced flowers borne on a slender, often twisted peduncle, this often decurved to procumbent. **Flowers** pedicellate, pedicels long, spreading, often recurved at apex. Individual flowers star-like, with yellow 9.5–13 mm, perianths. These long persistent, as shrivelled remnants pendent from the base of the ripening capsules. **Capsules** globose, 4.5–5 mm diameter. **Seeds** 3.5–4 mm long, brown, smooth and rounded without wings.

## SIMILAR TAXA

A rather distinct species unlikely to be confused with any of the other New Zealand *Bulbinella* species. Perhaps closest to *B. talbotii* L.B.Moore from which it is easily distinguished by the taller flower head with openly (laxly) arranged flowers. Some people believe it is very close to if not the same as *B. hookeri* (Hook.) Cheeseman. However, although quite variable, this species can be immediately distinguished by its obovoid capsules, containing elongated, narrowly winged almost black seeds.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (West Coast—scattered sites in lowland habitats south of Westport to about Okarito).

## HABITAT

Lowland pakihi and associated swamp forest.

## THREATS

As a lowland species of alluvial forest, pakihi, and back swamps, this species has become vulnerable to forest logging and wetland drainage, and populations have declined through the spread of introduced wetland weeds such as *Juncus bulbosus* and *J. squarrosus*. However, recent surveys (2004, 2005) have found numerous populations comprising many hundreds of plants. The overall impression is that this species has probably increased its range due to human modification of forested systems, thereby creating more pākihi wetlands, and that any decline is more likely to be the result of natural succession rather than any human induced threat.

## GENUS

*Bulbinella*

## FAMILY

Asphodelaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Bulbinella modesta* L.B.Moore

## SYNONYMS

None

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

December–January

## FRUITING

December–March

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seeds are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and division of whole plants. Prefers damp ground, with little (if any) competition from taller plants.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

## CULTIVATION

Not commercially available but plants are held by several Botanic Gardens and specialist growers

## ETYMOLOGY

**bulbinella**: Little bulb

**modesta**: Mild or modest

## NVS CODE

BULMOD

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 14

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

## ATTRIBUTION

Description modified from Moore and Edgar (1970).

Some of this factsheet information is derived from [Flora of New Zealand Online](#) and is used under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand](#) licence.

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/bulbinella-modesta/>

## PDF DATE

27 May 2026