

Caltha obtusa

COMMON NAMES

White caltha

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Glabrous rhizomatous perennial herb of alpine flushes, seepages, bogs and stream sides. Plants forming a compact turf, when flowering with scapes 20-60 mm tall. Rhizomes stout, fleshy, shortly-creeping, white. Leaves radical, clustered; petioles 8-12 mm long, slender; lamina seldom 8-12 × 7.5-11.0 mm, dark green to yellow green, usually unblemished, sometimes marked with darker bronze blotches and/or streaks, broadly oblong to suborbicular, base 2-lobed, subcordate, apex emarginate, margins crenate to crenate-dentate; lobes upturned, ± appressed to and not much shorter than lamina, crenate. Scapes stout, initially subsessile to sessile, soon elongating, and then up to 60 mm tall. Sepals 5, 8-18 × 6-12 mm, white, obovate, obtuse to acute. Stamens 10-15; carpels narrow-ovate in outline; styles rather long, slender. Ripe heads 12-18 mm diameter. Seeds 2-5 per follicle, 1.2- 1.5 mm long, glossy red-brown to dark purple brown, ovate to broadly ovate, ovate-elliptic or elliptic.

SIMILAR TAXA

Only reliably distinguished from other, small, alpine *Ranunculus* when flowering. From *Caltha novae-zelandiae* readily distinguished when flowering by the oblong-obovate white rather than linear-subulate yellow flowers, and vegetatively by the leaf margins which are crenate rather than shallowly sinuate to entire. Both *Caltha obtusa* and *C. novae-zelandiae* are easily distinguished from the uncommon, naturalised marsh marigold (*C. palustris*) by their much smaller size, turf-forming growth habit, ecology, and features of the foliage and flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island (from Canterbury southwards)

HABITAT

In alpine flushes, seepages, around tarns and slow flowing streams. Also found seen in damp areas in open grassland and in similar sites in fell field and herb field

GENUS

Caltha

FAMILY

Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY

Caltha obtusa Cheeseman



Lammerlaw Range. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Nevis Valley. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SYNONYMS

Psychrophila obtusa (Cheeseman) W.A.Weber

TAXONOMIC NOTES

New Zealand plants had long been placed in the genus *Caltha*, they were then referred to *Psychrophila*, a decision which was over ruled on the basis of a detailed study by Schuettpelez & Hoot (2004).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - February

FRUITING

February - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Can be grown in a pot but needs to be kept moist, free of bryophytes and algal growth. Needs plenty of light but resents high temperatures and humidity

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for November 2015](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

caltha: From the Greek kalathos 'goblet', refers to the form of the flower

obtusa: Blunt

NVS CODE

CALOBT

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: TL Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025](#)" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Schuettpelez, E.; Hoot, S.B. 2004: Phylogeny and biogeography of *Caltha* (Ranunculaceae) based on chloroplast and nuclear DNA sequences. *American Journal of Botany* 91(2): 247-253.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (28 March 2012). Description by P.J. de Lange.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Caltha obtusa* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/caltha-obtusa/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/caltha-obtusa/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026