

Ceratocephala pungens

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, EF, PD

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tiny, tufted, rosette-forming, annual herb 1.5-2 cm tall. Leaves 4-8 x 3-10 mm, grey-green, finely woolly-hairy, spatulate in outline, trilobed, each lobe divided 2-3 times, into oblong segments. Flowers solitary, unstalked or on short stalks 2-5 mm long. Sepals 4-5 mm, linear-oblongate, woolly beneath. Petals yellow, as long as sepals, linear-oblongate. Achenes (fruits) 20-30, 3-4 x 1.5 mm, woolly-hairy; keel flattened, triangular, beak 1-1.5 mm, erect, straight and slender, tapering into a spine.

SIMILAR TAXA

None

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island, Mackenzie Basin and Central Otago. Formerly known from the upper Waitaki River where it appears to be extinct.

HABITAT

A species of dry open ground, often amongst scabweed (*Raoulia* spp.) matts.

THREATS

At serious risk of extinction. The open scabweed habitats this species requires have, following the near demise of rabbits (as a consequence of the release of Rabbit calicivirus) been replaced by taller introduced and indigenous grasses. These grasses have all but replaced the relatively open habit *Ceratocephala* requires, so quickly that whole populations have disappeared within one growing season. If this trend continues unchecked then *Ceratocephala pungens* is likely to become extinct within the next 5-10 years.

GENUS

Ceratocephala

FAMILY

Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY

Ceratocephala pungens Garn.-Jones

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes



Galloway. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Galloway. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October - December

FRUITING

November - March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Spiny achenes are dispersed by attachment and possibly granivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild.

EXTRA INFORMATION

This unusual species is the only southern hemisphere representative of an otherwise northern hemisphere genus.

ETYMOLOGY

pungens: Sharp-pointed

NVS CODE

CERPUN

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, EF, PD

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, EF

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: EF, DP

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Critical

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, EF, NR, NStr, 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

de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Norton, D.A.; Rolfe, J.R.; Sawyer, J.W.D. 2010: Threatened Plants of New Zealand. Christchurch, Canterbury University Press. 471pp.

Garnock-Jones, P.J. 1984: *Ceratocephalus pungens* (Ranunculaceae), a new species from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 22: 135-137

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 September 2003. Description adapted from Garnock-Jones (1984) - see also de Lange et al. (2010).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ceratocephala-pungens/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/ceratocephala-pungens/>

