

Epilobium chionanthum

COMMON NAMES

marsh willowherb

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

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

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Loosely clumped perennial herb up to 0.75 m tall, producing numerous leafy stolons above and below ground; stems often reddish, mostly glabrous, strigulose along lines decurrent from the margins of the petioles below and all round above and in the inflorescence, more rarely pubescent all round to the base. Leaves much shorter than the internodes they subtend, mostly opposite, a few alternate in the inflorescence, dull green, paler beneath, the lateral veins quite prominent, 3-4 on each side of the midrib, subsessile; lamina 12-40 × 7-15 mm, elliptic to ovate, acute at the apex, narrowly cuneate to rounded at the base, margins serrulate, usually with 7-14 often obscure teeth on each side. Inflorescence erect. Flowers erect. Ovary 10-20 mm long, investiture mixed glandular and strigulose, on a pedicel 2-7 mm long. Floral tube 1.0-1.7 × 1.4-1.8 mm. Sepals 4.0-5.2 × 1.5-1.7 mm, slightly keeled, indumentum of mixed glandular and strigulose hairs. Petals 6.0-11.0 × 4.5-6.0 mm, notch 0.8-1.3 mm deep, white, often flushed pink at fertilisation. Stamens filaments white, of two types: long (2.0-3.5 mm long) and short (0.8-1.3 mm long), Anthers 1.3-1.5 × 0.6-0.7 mm, bright yellow. Style 5.2-9.0 mm long, white, stigma 1.0-2.0 × 0.9-2.0 mm, globose, obscurely 4-lobed, held above anthers in early anthesis. Capsule 40-60 mm long on a pedicel 12-28 mm long, moderately to densely strigulose and glandular. Seeds 1.4-1.8 mm long, dark brown, narrowly obovate to obovate, finely reticulate to reticulate-mamillate; coma 7.5-11.0 mm long, orange to orange-brown, persistent.

SIMILAR TAXA

Other *Epilobium* species. *E. chionanthum* has large flowers and hairless, dull green leaves with tiny teeth.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North, South and Chatham Islands.

HABITAT

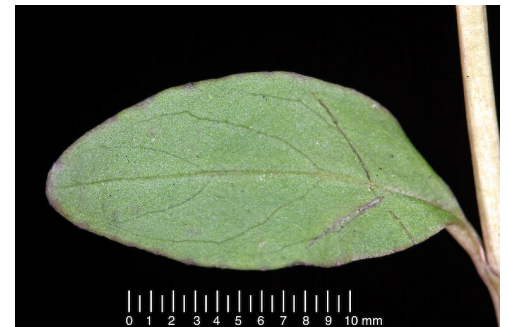
In swamps and wet swards of grasses or sedges, beside lakes or rivers, and in bogs. Lowland to upland, mostly below 900m a.s.l.

THREATS

At risk from wetland drainage and the spread of invasive weeds. Some populations have been destroyed by coastal development.



Waingawa River valley, Tararua Range.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
12/01/2008, Licence: CC BY.



Prominent lateral veins on leaf. Wairarapa.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
10/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

GENUS

Epilobium

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium chionanthum Hauss.

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October - March

FRUITING

November - April

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute papitate seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from rooted pieces and fresh seed. Tends to be short-lived and resents competition.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

ETYMOLOGY

epilobium: From the Greek epi- 'upon' and lobos 'a pod', the flowers appearing to be growing on the seed pod.

chionanthum: Snowy-white flower

NVS CODE

EPICHI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Gradual Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, Sp, TL Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland” Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NStr, RR, Sp 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

Raven, P.H.; Raven, T.E. 1976: The genus *Epilobium* in Australasia. New Zealand DSIR Bulletin 216. Wellington, Government Printer.

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

Webb, C.J.; Simpson, M.J.A. 2011: *Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons*. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 28 August 2011. Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-chionanthum/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026