

Epilobium elegans

COMMON NAMES

willowherb

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

A little known species very similar to *Epilobium tenuipes*, characterised by small stature, with leaves and flowers that are larger than those found in *E. tenuipes*.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial tufted herb. **Stems** simple to sparingly branched, slender 50–150 mm long, initially prostrate and rooting at nodes then ascending and becoming erect at tips; bifariously pubescent. **Leaves** opposite, crowded and overlapping in lower part, alternate within inflorescence portion of stem, sessile to subsessile; lamina 10–20 × 2–4 mm; light green, linear, narrow-elliptic to narrow-lanceolate, obtuse to subacute, membranous, glabrous, margins finely and obscurely denticulate or entire. **Flowers** erect, solitary or few, up to ± 8 mm diameter; sepals linear to very narrow-ovate; petals white, deeply lobed, ± 2× length of sepals. **Capsules** 20–30 mm long, reddish to pale brown, narrowed at apex, glabrous; pedicels elongated to 50 mm or more at maturity. **Seeds** smooth.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Epilobium tenuipes* from which it differs by its longer (10–20 mm cf. 5–10 mm in *E. tenuipes*), slightly broader (2–4 mm cf. 1–3 mm in *E. tenuipes*) leaves, larger flowers (up to 8 mm diameter in *E. elegans*, up to 4 mm diameter in *E. tenuipes*), glabrous rather glabrous to finely puberulent longer capsules (20–30 mm cf. 15–25 mm long in *E. tenuipes*) and consistently smooth rather smooth or minutely reticulate seeds.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (Marlborough to Otago, east of the main divide).

HABITAT

Lowland to montane in short (*Festuca*, *Poa* and *Rytidosperma*) and tall (*Chionochloa*-dominated) grassland and tussockland. In open ground often amongst *Raoulia* mats. Also found within braided river beds.

GENUS

Epilobium

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium elegans Petrie



Island Saddle, Molesworth. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 28/01/2018, Licence: CC BY-NC.



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TAXONOMIC NOTES

Raven & Raven (1976) treat *Epilobium elegans* as part of the natural variation within their concept of *Epilobium alsinoides* subsp. *tenuipes* (Hook.f.) P.H.Raven et Engelhorn (which is treated here as a species—*E. tenuipes* Hook.f.). Species rank for *E. elegans* is preferred because this species is commonly found growing sympatrically with *E. tenuipes* from which it remains morphologically distinct. In this respect the species concepts of the late A.P. Druce are followed (Druce 1993).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–March

FRUITING

December–May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Inclined to become weedy.

ETYMOLOGY

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

elegans: Elegant

NVS CODE

EPIELE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Data Deficient

2012 | Data Deficient

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NStr, 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

- Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
- Druce AP. 1993. Indigenous vascular plants of New Zealand. Ninth Revision. Unpublished Checklist held at Landcare Research, Lincoln, New Zealand.
- Raven PH, Raven TE. 1976. The genus *Epilobium* in Australasia. *New Zealand DSIR Bulletin 216*. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 321 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

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 September 2011. Description adapted from Allan (1961). 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/epilobium-elegans/>

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