Utricularia gibba

COMMON NAMES
bladderwort

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Sprawling submerged plant often floating just under the waters surface, with finely divided thread-like leaves with tiny round bladders (often black). Usually many small yellow snapdragon-like flowers are held above the water surface in summer and autumn.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Leaves are filamentous, up to 1 cm long, usually entire but occasionally branched. Bladders are up to 1.5 mm long and obliquely ovoid, situated on the leaves on short stalks. Small (c. 1 cm across) yellow flowers, with red stripes on the lower lip are commonly produced above the water surface either individually or in groups of up to 5 (8) on stems 3-20 cm long. Cleistogamous flowers are also produced on submerged stems. Capsules green, globose 2.5-3 mm across. Seed ovate, flattened with wing 0.75-1 mm x 0.7 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Utricularia australis(rare native species mostly in northern North Island) and U. geminiscapa (introduced species found in Westland). Utricularia gibba has entire or nearly entire leaves, whereas the other Utricularia species have leaves divided many times into filiform segments with larger bladders.

DISTRIBUTION
Abundant in Northland, Auckland and northern Waikato.

HABITAT
Most freshwater habitats, especially acidic and nutrient rich water.

GENUS
Utricularia

FAMILY
Lentibulariaceae

AUTHORITY
Utricularia gibba Lam.

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

Lake Waikere, Kai Iwi Lakes, Northland. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/03/2016, Licence: CC BY.

Lake Waikere, Kai Iwi Lakes, Northland. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/03/2016, Licence: CC BY.

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December, January, February

FRUITING
Summer - autumn

YEAR NATURALISED
1980

ORIGIN
Widespread and almost cosmopolitan in tropical and warm temperate countries

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Originally known from northwest Auckland, possibly introduced via the aquarium trade. In late 1990's found in Northland and likely to have been introduced from Australia via water fowl. Has rapidly spread over the past decade.

TOLERANCES
Tolerant of clean or nutrient-rich, warm or cold, still or slow-moving water.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Not usually controlled in New Zealand, but may be controlled manually, or mechanically.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial. Reproduces freely by seeds, turions, stem fragments. Forms dense mats. Dispersed by Water movement, dumped aquaria contents, contaminated machinery, eel nets, boats and trailers. Seed spread by water fowl.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
utricularia: A small bladder
gibba: From the Latin gibbus 'humped' or 'hunched', meaning gibbous, i.e. very convex or tumid

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES
This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the MPI website.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE
UTRGIB

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication. http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species.

Salmon, B. (2001). Carnivorous plants of New Zealand. Ecosphere Publications, Auckland. 303 pp.

Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch. 1365 pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/utricularia-gibba/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026