Ranunculus macropus

COMMON NAMES
swamp buttercup

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Semi-aquatic to aquatic herb. Rosettes tufted on stout creeping stems. Basal leaves on very stout petioles (7-)15-30(-40) mm x 5-10 mm, arising from bulbous nodes. Leaves ternate (15-)-20-40(-80) mm wide, leaflets sessile or shortly stalked, cuneiform, shallowly 3-fid, apices crenate, serrate or entire, lateral leaflets slightly to distinctly larger than terminal, caulien leaves few, similar to basal but smaller. Flowers (1-)3-5 per stem, 10-15(-20) mm diam., pedicels galbrous. Sepals speading or weakly recurved, glabrous. Petals (1-)3-5(-7), dark yellow, oblong to broadly oblong, shortly clawed, nectary single, 0.5-1(-1.5) mm from petal base. Receptacle with basal collar of bristles. Achenes 15-50(-65), hardly flattened, glabrous 1.5-2 mm, beak straight, 1-1.5 mm long.

Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 16/02/2021, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Close up of flower of Ranunculus macropus, Ex Cult. March 1989, from swamp near Gisborne. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Confused with *R. amphitrichus* and *R. glabrifolius*. Species hybridizes with *R. amphitrichus*, the progeny of which are fertile (P. J. de Lange pers. obs.). Species is distinguished by the larger flower, with broad, irregularly spaced, oblong petals, whose nectary scale is virtually obscured by a dense cluster of carpels when viewed from above. In good habitat and growing conditions *R. macropus* is a very robust plant with very large, ternate leaves borne on stout petioles.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic to the North and northern South Islands. In the North Island formerly widespread from the northern Waikato south to Wellington. Most recent collections come from the western Waikato, Rotorua Lakes District and East Cape to Hawke's Bay. In the South Island, apparently always scarce, and there seem to have been few collections made over the last 20 or so years. Recently (2010) a population was found at Canadian Flats on the Taieri River in Otago, and scattered populations are present in wetlands on the Canterbury Plains west of Christchurch, and at Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere.

HABITAT
Coastal to lowland. Usually found in raupō (*Typha orientalis*) dominated wetlands where it grows in still moderately deep to deep water.

THREATS
Threatened by wetland drainage, modification and the spread of weeds. In large parts of its former range hybrids are now more commonly encountered than the actual species.

GENUS
Ranunculus

FAMILY
Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY
Ranunculus macropus Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
Ranunculus longipetiolatus Colenso

TAXONOMIC NOTES
This species seems to be a shy flowerer, and is more often found in a sterile, vegetative state than reproductive. This trait is carried over into F1 hybrids. Hybrids are common wherever wetlands containing this species and *R. amphitrichus* have been modified, e..g, the wetlands of the lower Waikato. The taxonomic distinctiveness of *Ranunculus macropus* needs further study. It is truly, as Cheeseman (1925) makes clear a 'critical species'.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September - April (but sporadic flowering may occur at anytime of the year)

FRUITING
October - July

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from the division of whole plants and from fresh seed. A wetland species which requires permanently damp but sunny situations, Good in shallow ponds.

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

ETYMOLOGY
ranunculus: From the Latin 'rana' frog, meaning little frog and probably refers to the plants typical marshy habit where frogs abound
macropus: Big foot

NVS CODE
RANMAC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 96

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Data Deficient
2012 | Data Deficient
2009 | Data Deficient
2004 | Gradual Decline
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR 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 Critical | Qualifiers: CR, DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RF 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, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I. Wellington, Government Printer
Cheeseman, T.F. 1925: *Manual of the New Zealand Flora*. Wellington, Government Printer.
Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. 1988: *Flora of New Zealand. Vol. IV*. Christchurch, DSIR Botany Division.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (30 August 2003). Description based on Allan (1961), Webb et al. (1988) and fresh specimens.
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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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