

Epilobium gracilipes

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Dark reddish-tinged, decumbent perennial herb bearing numerous leafy stems and forming clumped, matted patches up to 200 mm diameter.

Plants with lines of erect or appressed non-glandular hairs decurrent from the margins of the petioles. **Leaves** mostly opposite, alternate in the inflorescence, thick, fleshy lustrous, dark green tinged red or bright red above, usually bright red below, lateral veins not prominent, 2–3 on each side of midrib; petioles 1.2 mm long; lamina 5–18 × 3–10 mm (often equal in length to the internodes they subtend), narrowly ovate or ovate, apex rounded, obtuse to aubacute, base truncate, margins revolute, coarsely, remotely serrulate, teeth absent or up to 4 either side. **Inflorescences** 1–3–(8)-flowered, glabrous, borne in the axils of the upper leaves, nodding; flowers nodding, ovaries erect. **Ovaries** 8–18 mm long, on glabrous pedicels 10–34 mm long. **Floral tube** 0.5–1.5 × 0.9–1.4 mm, glabrous. **Sepals** keeled, 3.6–4.6 × 0.8–1.1 mm, glabrous. **Petals** 3.5–6.4 × 2.5–4.5 mm, white (sometimes flushed pink), the notch 0.7–1.8 mm deep. **Anthers** 0.6–0.8 × 0.35–0.45 mm, yellow; filaments white, those of the longer stamens 1.5–3.5 mm long, those of the shorter 1.0–1.5 mm long, the anthers of both pairs or the longer ones only shedding pollen directly onto stigma after the flower opens. **Style** 2.2–3.6 mm long, white; stigma 1.0–1.5 × 0.7–0.8 mm, white, clavate. **Capsule** 28–50 mm long, on pedicels 17–60 mm long. **Seeds** 1.1–1.5 mm long, brown to grey-brown or orange-brown, oblong-obovate to obovate, finely reticulate-mamillate; coma 3.0–7.0 mm long, white, persistent or caducous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Epilobium gracilipes is a very distinctive species easily recognised by its ecological preference for base-rich (usually limestone, marble and associated calcareous rock), and by the combination of having a decumbent, clumped growth habit, stems with pubescent lines decurrent from the petiole margins, thick, fleshy, glossy, dark green, red-tinged or bright red leaves (with distinctive red undersides), and nodding flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from Maungapohatu (Te Urewera) south but scarce), South Island.

HABITAT

Epilobium gracilipes is a basicolous species confined to limestone, marble and other associated calcareous rocks (there is one known occurrence on andesite rocks on Mt Ruapehu). It is known from montane to alpine habitats (strictly subalpine to alpine in the North Island), and favours sheltered cliff faces and crevices in open forest, shrubland or grassland. Although *E. gracilipes* has a highly disjunct distribution it is usually common at the sites where it has been found.

GENUS

Epilobium



In cultivation ex NW Ruahine Range. Dec 1977. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Castle Hill, Canterbury. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 11/01/2024, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium gracilipes Kirk

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November–March

FRUITING

January–May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Epilobium gracilipes is a very attractive species well suited for cultivation in a rock garden. For best results it should be planted on or near some limestone rock, or given regular applications of lime. It prefers a sunny, well drained situation or plants are inclined to suffer from powdery mildew. Unlike many other epilobia *E. gracilipes* is not inclined to be weedy. Plants may be short-lived. Easily grown from rooted pieces and fresh seed.

ETYMOLOGY

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

gracilipes: Derived from the Latin words gracilis meaning 'slender' and pes meaning 'foot'

NVS CODE

EPIGRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, RR

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient 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 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>.

Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 428 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (28 October 2012). Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026