New Zealand Pigmyweed

Species Description

Scientific name: *Crassula helmsii*
AKA: *Tillaea aquatica*, Australian Swamp-stonecrop, Briweg Seland Newydd (Welsh), *Tillaea recurva*
Native to: Australia and New Zealand
Habitat: Aquatic up to 3m deep in still or slow flowing water bodies or terrestrial around pond or lake margins

Can be submerged, emergent and terrestrial. Readily recognisable when growing at the edges of water bodies by its fleshy leaves. Submerged leaves are less easy to see and recognise. Reproduces from very small stem fragments but does not produce viable seed in the UK.

Introduced in 1911 as an oxygenating plant for ponds and, since the 1970s, has spread rapidly. Forms dense mats and can impede drainage, causing flooding. Displaces other aquatic plant species and reduces amenity use of the waterbody.

New Zealand Pigmyweed is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause this species to grow in the wild.

For details of legislation go to [www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation).

Key ID Features

Forms dense mats within the water body

Flowers very small, often absent, whitish-green to slightly pink

Flowers have 4 petals

Leaves up to 2cm long in opposite pairs

Leaf bases joined around the stem to form a collar

Leaves fleshy when emergent or terrestrial, flatter when permanently submerged

Round stem
Identification of terrestrial, emergent and submerged forms

Terrestrial: Growing away from the water’s edge or left stranded as water level falls, creeping stems and aerial, fleshy leaves.

Emergent: Densely packed leaves in water, intermediate between terrestrial and submerged form (occurs in water <0.6m deep).

Submerged: Elongated stems with leaves sparse and flat, able to form extensive mats on bed of the water body.

Similar Species

A group of species known as water-starworts are most likely to be confused with New Zealand pigmyweed. Water-starworts are distinguished from New Zealand pigmyweed by their non-fleshy leaves, which are usually notched at the tip (hold up to light or use hand lens), and lack of collar at leaf base.

Water-starworts
Native (Callictriche species)

Non-fleshy leaves

Fleshy leaves without notched tips

New Zealand Pigmyweed
For comparison

New Zealand pigmyweed collar around stem at base of leaves

Water-starwort leaf with typically notched tip, a hand lens is usually required to see this properly

References and further reading:
Preston, C D and Croft, J M (1997) “Aquatic plants in Britain and Ireland”, Harley Books

Distribution


Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution.

Distribution map

Photos from: Olaf Booy, Richard Lansdown (RL), Peter Llewellyn, Max Wade