

Utricularia australis



Image by Mark Wapstra

FAMILY: LENTIBULARIACEAE

BOTANICAL NAME: *Utricularia australis*
R.Br., *Prodr. Fl. Nov. Holland.*: 430 (1810)

COMMON NAME: Yellow bladderwort

COMMONWEALTH STATUS (EPBC Act):
Not Listed

TASMANIAN STATUS (TSP Act): rare

Description

Utricularia australis is a rootless, submerged perennial herb, with delicate flexuose stems 0.3 to 0.9 m long (depending on water depth). It has alternately arranged pinnate leaves that are divided into two branches at the base, with 10 to 14 alternate leaflets divided into thread-like segments. Bladders 1.5 to 4 mm long occur at the base of the leaflets. A spray of 2 to 8 yellow flowers terminates an erect, emergent stalk to 16 cm long, each flower's lower lip being up to 18 mm wide. Fruit a many-seeded, 1-celled globular capsule (description from Curtis 1967 and Aston 1973). Flowering occurs from November to April. [Previously known as *Utricularia flexuosa* (Curtis 1967, Baker & De Salas 2012)]

Distribution and Habitat

On mainland Australia *Utricularia australis* occurs in all States and the Northern Territory. In Tasmania the species has a widespread distribution, ranging from the Gordon River in the southwest to the northern part of Flinders Island in the far northeast (and also reportedly from the Derwent River in the State's south). It grows in stationary or slow-moving water, including natural lakes, farm dams and reservoirs, where it has been reported as forming 'locally dense swards'.

Key Sites and Populations

Big Waterhouse Lake, Cataract Gorge, Gordon River (Lake Morrison, Snag Point Lake), Lake Tiberias, Steiglitz (Windmill Lagoon and Jocks Lagoon) and the 'old' St Helens Reservoir.

Known Reserves

Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park, Lake Tiberias Game Reserve, Mount Pearson Nature Reserve, St Helens Conservation Area, Trevallyn Nature recreation Area, Waterhouse Conservation Area and Wingaroo Nature Reserve.

Ecology and Management

Species of the genus *Utricularia* have ‘bladdertraps’ to digest insects. The bladders are hinged by a flap, which forms a door or valve that only opens inwards. The inner walls of the bladder contain glandular hairs that remove water, reducing water pressure inside. The door is firmly closed unless it is thrown out of structure. Stiff bristles project from the door and serve as a tripping device so that when a small animal comes in contact with these hairs, the door opens and the inrush of water carries the animal into the trap. The door then slowly closes and as water is again pumped out the trap returns to the ‘set’ position (Curtis 1967, Hughes & Davis 1989).

Insects are the most likely pollination vector for *Utricularia australis* (A. Hingston pers. comm.), while birds presumably assist in dispersal of its minute seed. The species possess turions (or ‘winter-buds’) that allow vegetative survival through periods of unfavourable conditions (Aston 1973).

Flowering plants have been observed in Tasmania only rarely, flowering possibly being triggered by elevated water temperatures. The most recent flowering ‘event’ was observed at Cataract Gorge’s First Basin in February 2013.

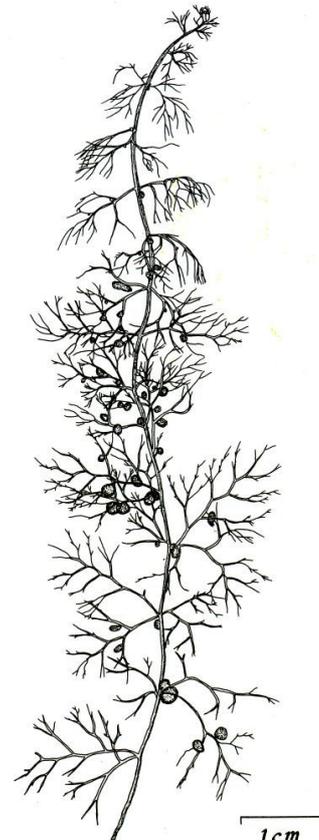
As an aquatic species, permanent changes to the local hydrology will be to its detriment.

Conservation Status Assessment

Only a few records for *Utricularia australis* in Tasmania were known at the time of its listing on the TSP Act in 1995, viz., Lake Tiberias, the Swan and Little Swanport Rivers, Cataract Gorge and two lakes beside the Gordon River (Hughes & Davis 1977). Several additional sites have emerged in the past five to ten years, extending the species’ range to the northeast and also Flinders Island. In the absence of flowering material the species is likely to have been overlooked in its submerged vegetative state due to its resemblance to *Myriophyllum* spp. A reassessment of its conservation status may be warranted, though in the first instance the status of older sites should be determined.

Further Information

- Aston, H.I (1973). *Aquatic plants of Australia*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Baker, M. & De Salas, M. (2012). *A Census of the Vascular Plants of Tasmania & Index to the Student’s Flora of Tasmania and Flora of Tasmania Online*. Tasmanian Herbarium, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

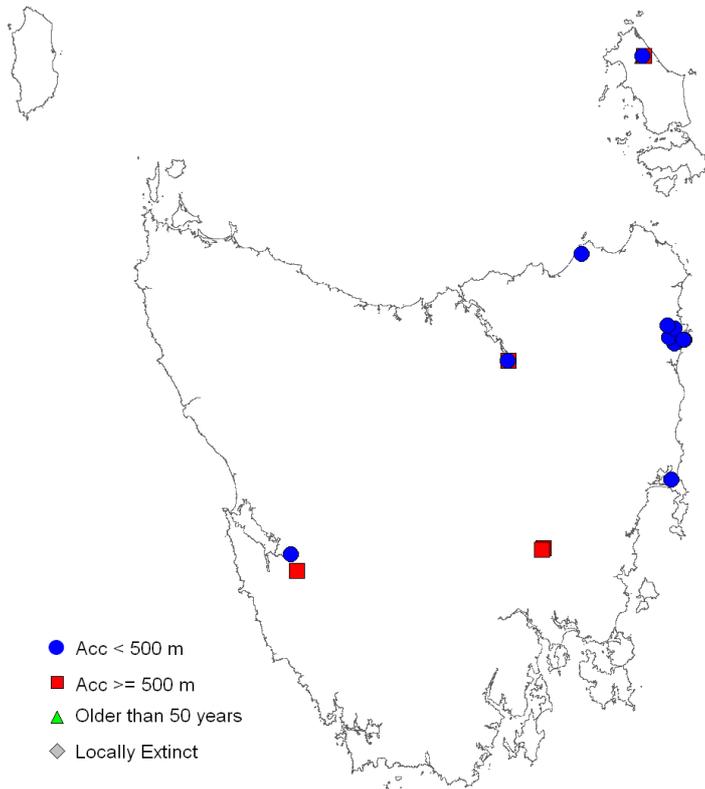


Drawing by G. Davis

- Curtis, W.M. (1967). *The Student's Flora of Tasmania, Part 3*. Government Printer, Hobart.
- Hughes, J.M.R. & Davis, G.L. (1989). *Aquatic Plants of Tasmania*. University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne.

Tasmanian Distribution

(As per Threatened Species Section records, February 2013)



1:25 000 Map Sheets

Binalong, Friendly, Launceston, Limekiln, McCall, St Helens, Stonor, Waterhouse, Wingaroo.

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View

<http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/threatenedspecieslists>

Contact details

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Permit

It is an offence to collect, disturb, damage or destroy this species unless under permit.