

# BIODIVERSITY BRIEFING

## New Zealand Pygmyweed/Swamp Stonecrop

### Introduction

This briefing is designed to improve awareness of *Crassula helmsii*, an invasive species better known as New Zealand Pygmyweed or Swamp Stonecrop. The plant originates from Australia and New Zealand and has been introduced around the world over the last one hundred years. Gardeners used it to oxygenate ponds or small bodies of water until it was banned from sale at garden centres in 2014. The species escaped into the UK countryside during the 1950's and is now found at thousands of sites. The plant thrives in small or slow-moving water bodies, where it quickly forms impenetrable mats which kill or drive away native species. If left undetected it will rapidly form large dense mats on the surface or edges of water bodies. We are aware of its presence at a few CEMEX sites and so it is important we highlight the problem.

**The invasive species is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, so it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause it to grow in the wild – the implication being that CEMEX sites must not become donor sites where the species can spread into the wider countryside as we could be liable for prosecution.**

### Removing New Zealand Pigmyweed

Early and regular treatment is highly recommended. In small ponds, regular digging out of the plant may be an effective control technique, but care needs to be taken as small fragments can disperse and regenerate. New Zealand Pygmyweed does seem to be less vigorous in ponds with plants that provide some shade, like that provided by the native bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, for example. On the edges of water bodies, covering infestations with black polythene for at least three months during the growing season can also be effective, although be aware this technique has adverse effects on native species.



Pictures show New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) which has leaves similar to native Stonecrop species. The flower however only has four prominent petals which is markedly different to native stonecrops which have five. The invasive species also forms extensive mats on or beside water bodies, no native stonecrop would do this.



Native English Stonecrop – five petals

### Key Points

- If you suspect you have New Zealand Pygmyweed at your site, it's important to let us know – contact either **Sean Cassidy** or **Jenny Oldroyd (RSPB)** for further advice.
- It's important not to spread the invasive species – don't walk on it or disturb it – even small fragments could be carried to other sites.
- Don't try to dig it out with mobile plant or equipment, experience has shown this only spreads the invasive species faster, so expert advice or supervision is required.

**For further details or information, please contact a member of the Sustainability Department.**