



Government  
of South Australia

# WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

## BULBIL WATSONIA



*Bulbil watsonia plant*



*Closeup of flowers*



*Closeup of cormils*



*Dense infestation in paddock*

# BULBIL WATSONIA



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Bulbil watsonia, *Watsonia meriana* var. *bulbillifera*, is a perennial weed from South Africa. It was accidentally introduced among ornamental gladioli and watsonias in the 19th century and has spread from former garden plantings to become a weed in southern Australia.

## Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- Absent
Northern pastoral	- Absent
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- Absent
Murray Mallee	- Absent
South East	- Occasional
Central	- Locally common in high rainfall areas, especially southern Mt Lofty Ranges.

## Impacts

The tough fibrous leaves are unpalatable. Selective grazing by stock results in desirable pasture species being replaced by bulbil watsonia with a consequent decrease in stocking capacity.

Bulbil watsonia also encroaches into native vegetation, especially along creek lines, forming dense colonies that exclude other plants.

## Recognition

Bulbil watsonia is a large perennial herb with leaves and flower stems produced annually. The root system is shallow, dense and fibrous. There is a round, flattened underground corm encased in a tunic of coarse fibres. A fan-shaped cluster of 5-7 erect, sword-shaped leaves, each 3-4 cm wide and up to 1m long, grows at the base of the plant over winter.

Dark red flowering stems 1.5 - 2 m tall appear in spring. The flowers are brick red or dull orange, arranged in two opposite rows at the top of the stem. Each flower is tubular, about 6 cm long, with six small petals and three purple stamens.

Bulbil watsonia does not reproduce by seeds. Instead, globular clusters of cormils (small, beaked corms about 1 cm long) are formed on the stem below the flowers. The cormil clusters are dark red and about 2 cm diameter; they immediately distinguish this weed from all the garden species of *Chasmanthe*, *Crocasmia*, *Gladiolus* and *Watsonia*.

## Biology

Bulbil watsonia is slow to spread but forms permanent populations once established. It is most abundant on acidic soils with poor drainage but can grow on a wide range of soils.

The dormant corms formed in the previous year germinate rapidly at the first autumn rains and new corms already begin to form before the flowers appear in October to early December. The leaves and stems die back by late December. Bulbil watsonia is spread by corms and cormils carried in contaminated soil and produce, or attached to farm machinery.

## Further Information :

Cooke, D.A. (1998) Bulbil watsonia is a variety of *Watsonia meriana*. J. Adelaide Bot. Gard. 18: 5-8.

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd edn. Inkata Press.

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**For more advice on recognising and controlling bulbil watsonia, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board :**



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