Watsonia

Watsonia meriana 'Bulbillifera'

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Iridaceae (iris) family

Also known as
Watsonia bulbillifera, bugle lily

Where is it originally from?
South Africa

Photo: Trevor James

What does it look like?
Gladioli-like, clump-forming, summer-green perennial (<2 m tall) with stout, fibrous coated corms (5-7 cm diameter) that multiply at ground level. Stems (2 cm diameter) are stiffly erect, and light green leaves (2-5 x 30-60 cm) arising from base are sword-shaped, folded, tough and fibrous. Curved and trumpet-shaped brick-red or salmon-pink flowers (3-4 cm diameter, Oct-Nov) on long stems are followed by distinctive shiny, red-brown clusters of aerial corms (10-25 mm long), 'bulbils' along the stems. No seed is produced in New Zealand.

Are there any similar species?
Similar to other *Watsonia* species, montbretia, and gladiolus, but is the only species with aerial corms. Flowers of garden cultivars can also be white, rose and pink.

Photo: Trevor James

Why is it weedy?
Forms dense infestations and thick underground carpets of corms and roots, crowding out other species. Each bulbil along the stem can form a new plant, and it tolerates a wide range of growing conditions. It's a particular problem in bare land especially damp sites, riverbeds, streamsides, fernland, tussockland, and sparse low-growing shrubland. Tolerates high to low temperatures but is intolerant of shade.

How does it spread?
Soil and water movement, dumped vegetation, and road graders all spread the corms. Common on frequently-sprayed or damaged sites, especially roadsides, wasteland, railway lines and industrial land.

What damage does it do?
Smothers ground in open areas, preventing the establishment of native plant seedlings. Can cause silt to accumulate on alluvial sites, leading to flooding or changes in habitat.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Bare land especially damp sites, riverbeds, streamsides, fernland, tussockland and sparse low-growing shrubland.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - Dig or pull-out small infestations. Dispose of all plant material at a landfill or refuse transfer station. Ensure no plant material is left on site.
2. Foliar spray (spring-summer) - Apply herbicide using a hand held sprayer/knapsack. Apply a mix of glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide at 15ml/L + metsulfuron herbicide (600g/kg active ingredient) at 0.4g/L + an organo silicone penetrant at recommended label rate, and thoroughly wet all parts of plant.
CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and directions for the purchase, use and storage of the product, are followed and adhered to.

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Corms often resprout after spraying. Maintain clean roadsides. Follow up annually in spring-summer.