

Psilocarphus elatior

English name tall woolly-heads

Scientific name *Psilocarphus elatior*

Family *Asteraceae* (Aster)

Other scientific names *Psilocarphus oregonus* var. *elatior*

Risk status

BC: critically imperilled (S1); red-listed

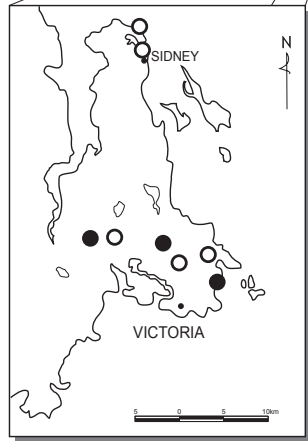
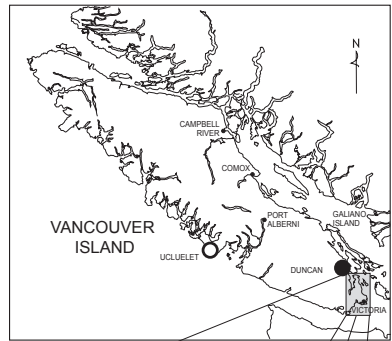
Canada: endangered (N1); COSEWIC: endangered (Pacific population)

Global: apparently secure (G4)

Elsewhere: California – vulnerable (S3); Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington – not ranked (SNR)

Range/Known distribution

Tall woolly-heads occurs in western North America, extending northward from northern California through Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. In Canada, it only occurs in southwestern British Columbia. Currently, in British Columbia there are **4** recently confirmed sites and **8** unconfirmed historic sites (6 of which are considered extirpated).



Distribution of *Psilocarphus elatior*

- recently confirmed sites
- unconfirmed sites

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Field description

A **white-flowered annual** herb from a short taproot. The **5-15 cm tall stems** are upright and moderately branched above and reclining below. There are **no basal leaves**, and the stem leaves are **opposite, linear to oblong, moderately silky to woolly hairy**, and 0.5-3.5 cm long by 2-6 mm wide. **Single flower heads occur at the angles between leaves and stems** or at the tips of branches, and are composed of disk (tube-like) flowers. Bracts (small leaves beneath the flowers) are hooded and balloon-like. Fruits are non-hairy cylindrical achenes (single seeded, non-splitting capsules) with small styles at their tips.

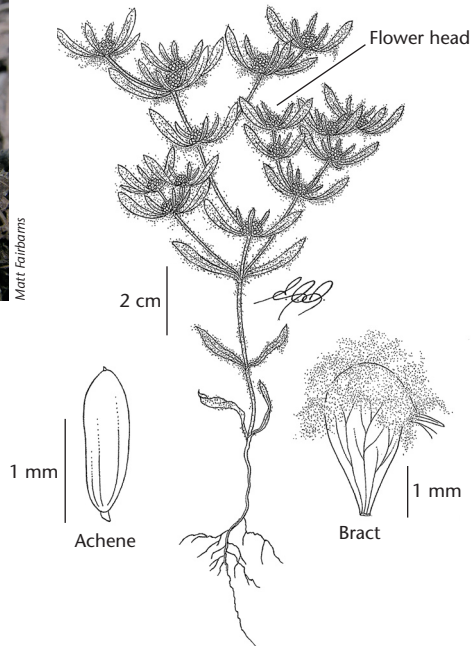
IDENTIFICATION TIPS

This species can be found from the end of May through July. Young tall woolly-heads plants are frequently difficult to separate from young plants of cudweed (*Gnaphalium palustre* and *G. uliginosum*) with which they often grow. Cudweed plants differ in that they have alternate leaves and round, flat, densely woolly flower heads with broad ray (single petal) flowers.



Matt Fairbairns

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Life history

Tall woolly-heads is an annual plant. The species is likely self-pollinating and seed dispersal is either by water or wind. In vernal pool habitats, the muddy feet of waterfowl and other animals may disperse the achenes.

Habitat

This plant inhabits vernal pools and other open, moist, often disturbed sites in seasonally flooded grass-dominated meadows. In the spring, these habitats can appear to be nearly bare patches of muddy ground or shallow water. Associated native herbaceous species include toad rush (*Juncus bufonius*), sedges (*Carex* spp.), common camas (*Camassia quamash*), lowland cudweed (*Gnaphalium palustre*), skunkweed (*Navarretia squarrosa*), knotweed (*Polygonum* sp.), and Scouler's popcornflower (*Plagiobothrys scouleri*). Non-native associated species include water meadow-foxtail* (*Alopecurus geniculatus*), annual bluegrass* (*Poa annua*), creeping bentgrass* (*Agrostis stolonifera*), and red sand-spurry* (*Spergularia rubra*). Tall woolly-heads sometimes occurs in association with rare plants, including the red-listed species Kellogg's rush (*J. kelloggii*), Carolina meadow-foxtail (*A. carolinianus*), paintbrush owl-clover (*Castilleja ambigua*), and winged water-starwort (*Callitriche marginata*) and the blue-listed species heterocodon (*Heterocodon rariflorum*). Adjacent habitats are often dominated by shrubs, including Scotch broom* (*Cytisus scoparius*), Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*), hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*) and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Elevations: to 100 m.

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Why the species is at risk

The range of tall woolly-heads is declining in British Columbia, primarily due to habitat destruction. Populations on private property are not protected from development activities. Pedestrian traffic, mountain biking, and park enhancement and management activities pose a potential threat to populations that occur in parks. Because tall woolly-heads is relatively inconspicuous and disappears by mid-summer, it is difficult for people to recognize and avoid the plants in their activities. At some sites, fire suppression is allowing shrubs to invade tall woolly-heads habitat.

What you can do to help this species

Management practices should be tailored to the needs of the site. Potential management tools will depend on the specific circumstances and may require experimentation prior to implementation. **Before taking any action, expert advice must be obtained and no action taken without it. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.**

Searches for tall woolly-heads should be made between the end of May and the beginning of July in muddy depressions and drying beds of vernal pools. Tall woolly-heads habitats should be protected from development, excessive foot and mountain bike traffic, filling with gravel or other materials, and changes in hydrology such as ditching and draining.

References

Douglas, George W., Joyce Gould, and Jeanne M. Illingworth. 2001. COSEWIC Status Report on Tall Woolly-heads *Psilocarphus elatior* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

For further information, contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the web site at: www.goert.ca.

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* Refers to non-native species.