Watsonia meriana (L.) Mill.

FM: Iridaceae
LF: Perennial herb
SN: *Antholyza meriana* L., *Watsonia bulbillifera* J.W. Mathews & L. Bolus
CU: Ornamental
CN: Bugle lily, bulbil watsonia, wild watsonia

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Invaded Habitats

Woodland, heathland, grassland, riparian habitats, seasonal wetlands, coastal dunes, disturbed sites.

Description

Erect herb, 1.2–1.8 m tall, with corms. Corms up to 8 cm in diameter. Flower stems reddish, sometimes branched above. Bulbils (cormils) in clusters at nodes on the upper stem, 6–7 mm in diameter. Leaves up to 70 cm long and 4–5 cm wide, glabrous, with prominent midvein. Most leaves arising from the corm, stem leaves much smaller. Flowers in a terminal spike, brick red to salmon pink, trumpet-shaped, 6–8 cm long. Corolla tube curved. Fruits are capsules, ovoid, blackish, 3–4 cm long (Parsons and Cuthbertson, 2001; Flora of Australia, 2014).

Ecology and Impacts

Bulbil watsonia does not set seeds in Australia and spreads vegetatively by corms and bulbils. These are dispersed by soil movement, machinery and water streams. Plants in North America occasionally produce viable seeds (Flora of North America, 2014). A single plant produces hundreds of bulbils that easily detach (Blood, 2001).

The plant grows in dense stands that reduce native plant species richness and prevent any regeneration of overstorey species. The plant grows in sun and partial shade, and withstands flooding for several weeks. In Australia the plant invades a number of natural habitats including dry and damp sclerophyll forests and seasonal freshwater wetlands. Dense infestations are species poor and the weed persists once established (Blood, 2001).

Control

Single plants can be hand-pulled or grubbed any time before bulbils form. Mowing or slashing kills top growth but does not affect corms in the soil. Cutting at 10–15 cm height when the stems first emerge but before they elongate prevents formation of new corms. An effective herbicide is 2,2-DPA applied before the first flowers are formed (Moore and Fletcher, 1994; Parsons and Cuthbertson, 2001).