

W.12 BLUE WATER LILY/BLOUWATERLELIE

(*Nymphaea caerulea* Sav.)

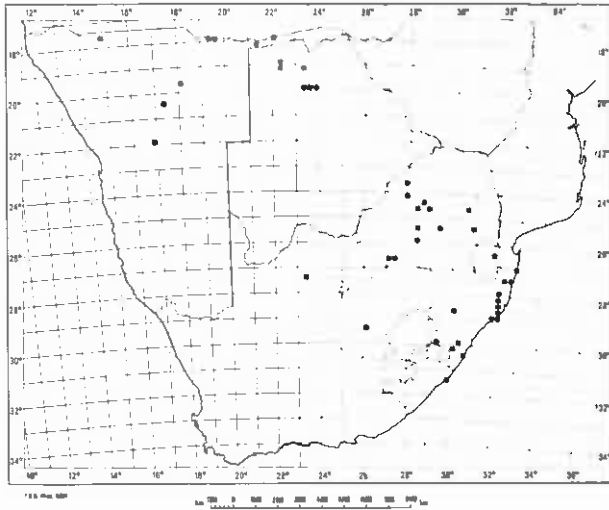
Family: Nymphaeaceae

(Compiled by the Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria)

Blue water lily is a perennial with large, round, floating leaves arising from spongy roots. The leaves are about 150 to 300 mm across and are usually bluish-green above and purple below. Tubular leaf stalks, up to 3 m long, are attached to the centre of the lower surface of the leaf blade. The leaf margins are smooth apart from a wedge-shaped incision on one side.

The conspicuous flowers, with many pale blue to pink or white petals, are 60 to 200 mm across. Mature fruits are borne under water as their stalks shorten when ripening. In shape the fruits resemble a small tomato 20 to 40 mm across and they contain many small, brown seeds embedded in a whitish spongy tissue.





Related species

Blue water lily is the only wild species of *Nymphaea* in the region in which the margin of the leaves is smooth, not toothed. (Most cultivated water lilies are introduced). Species of *Nymphoides* (floating heart) are sometimes confused with water lilies. The leaves of floating heart are, however, yellow-green, tougher and usually smaller than those of water lilies, while its white or yellow flowers are much smaller (only 25 to 30 mm across) and have only five hairy petals.

Distribution

The blue water lily is found from Egypt southwards throughout tropical Africa. It is widely distributed in Southern Africa, but appears to be absent from the arid regions and the winter rainfall area.

Ecology

Blue water lily grows in still to slow-flowing water 1,5 to 3 m deep, in pans, dams and rivers. It occurs in water with widely varying acidity and nutrient content. Frequently it is found growing

with other water plants, such as floating heart (*Nymphoides indica*) and star bladderwort (*Utricularia stellaris*), or among firmly anchored swamp plants such as common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) that protect it from wave and wind action.

Importance

This is the most troublesome water lily in the region. When its leaves cover the entire surface of small dams it affects other plants and animals, especially fish. In larger water bodies it may interfere with boating and fishing and contribute to silting-up.

Legislation and control

There is no legislation for the control of water lilies. For control measures see Steyn, Scott, Ashton & Vivier (1979).

Notes

The scientific name is derived from the Greek *numphaios* = sacred to the nymphs and *caeruleus* = blue.

Species Number: 2513.000-00100

Literature

- MENDONÇA, F.A., 1960. Nymphaeaceae, in EXELL, A.W. & WILD, H. *Flora Zambesiaca*, volume 1.
- MUSIL, C.F., 1973. *Water plants of Natal - a guide to the important species*. The Wildlife Protection and Conservation Society of South Africa.
- OBERMEYER, A.A., 1967. Waterlilies in South Africa. *Flora & Fauna* 18: 31-35.
- STEYN, D.J., SCOTT, W.E., ASHTON, P.J. & VIVIER, F.S. 1979. *Guide to the use of herbicides on aquatic plants*. Technical Report No. TR 95. Pretoria: Department of Water Affairs.
- WILD, H., 1961. Harmful aquatic plants in Africa and Madagascar. *Kirkia* 2: 1-66.