

## W.20 DUCKWEED/DAMSLYK

(*Lemna gibba* L.)

Family: Lemnaceae

(Compiled by the Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria)

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Duckweed is a very small, free floating, green plant, no more than 6 mm across. It consists of one to several disc-shaped leaf-like structures with a swollen submerged portion of large air-filled cells. Each leaf-like structure bears a single root up to about 100 mm long. The minute flowers are seldom seen and are contained in small pockets. Seeds are rarely found and duckweed generally multiplies by budding, a process by which older plants produce new plants that eventually become separate.



### Related species

Nine species of duckweed are known in Southern Africa. They can be divided into two main groups: (1) plants with roots, and (2) rootless plants. The present species is the only one in the region with a single root and a swollen submerged portion. While most species of duckweed are more or less round, some may be strap- or cigar-shaped. The smallest duckweed in Southern Africa (*Wolffia arrhiza* (L.) Horkel ex Wimm.) is rootless and only about 1 mm across.

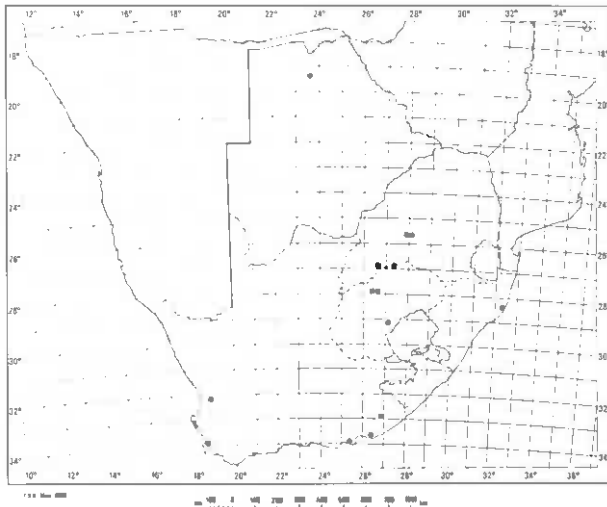
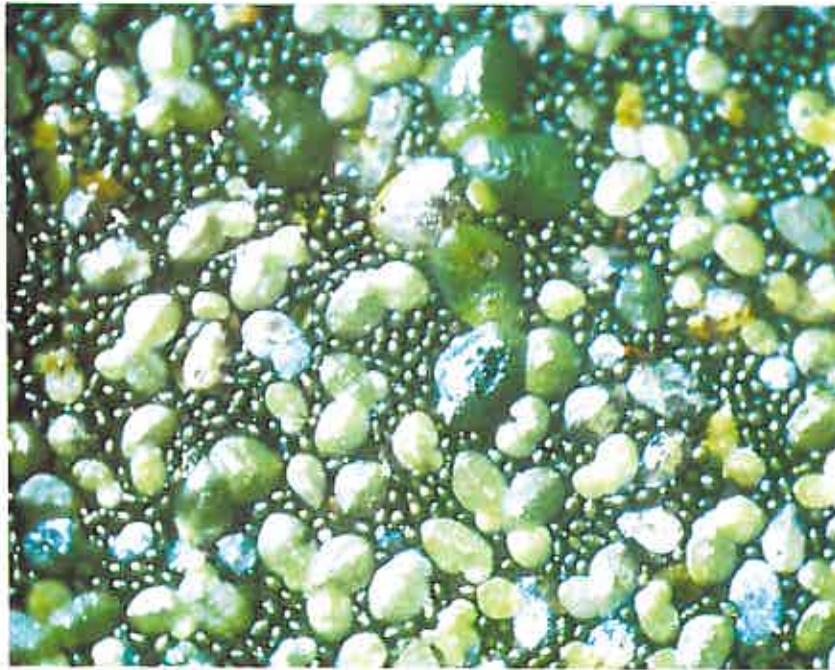
### Distribution

Duckweed is found in the temperate regions of the five continents. It is widely distributed in Southern and tropical Africa.

### Ecology

Duckweed thrives in the still, fertile water of pans, pools, dams and backwaters of rivers and streams.





### Importance

In nutrient-rich water and at fairly high temperatures duckweed increases at an astonishing rate, soon covering wide expanses of water and in time forming a thick scum. Especially at high

temperatures, the decaying old plants absorb oxygen and give off carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide, making the water unpalatable to livestock and unsuitable for fish.

### Legislation

There is no legislation for the control of duckweed.

### Notes

*Lemna* is the Greek word for a scale, referring to the resemblance of the plant (at least when seen from above) to the scales of a fish; *gibba* = fat.

**Species Number: 0795.000 - 00100**

### Literature

- LANDOLT, E., 1975. Morphological differentiation and geographical distribution of the *Lemna gibba* - *Lemna minor* group. *Aquatic Botany* 1: 345-363.
- MUSIL, C.F., 1973. *Water plants of Natal - a guide to the important species*. The Wildlife Protection Society of South Africa.
- SCULTHORPE, C.D. 1967. *The biology of aquatic vascular plants*. London: Edward Arnold.