

Carex appressa

COMMON NAMES

southern cutty grass, tussock sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout, rhizomatous sedge, forming robust, harsh and rigid, dark green tussocks. **Culms** 0.2–1.4 m tall, 3.0–6.5 mm wide, acutely trigonous, angles prominently scabrid above; basal sheaths shining, light to dark grey-brown, rarely purple-brown. **Leaves** usually > culms, 3–7 mm wide, channelled, stiffly erect, immature leaves with pungent apices, margins and keel very scabrid. **Inflorescence** an erect, elongated, mostly compact, stiff panicle 60–250 × 10–30 mm, usually interrupted below, branchlets us. < 35 mm long, more crowded above, appressed to inflorescence axis. **Spikes** 5–6 mm long, red-brown, ovoid, androgynous, male flowers terminal. **Glumes** slightly < utricles, ovate, acute, often furnished with a short scabrid mucro, brown with lighter brown midrib. **Utricles** c. 2.5–3.5 × 1.5 mm, plano-convex, conspicuously many-nerved, dark brown; tapered to a beak 1.0–1.5 mm long, margins distinctly toothed, orifice bifid; sharply constricted to a narrow stipe 2–4 mm. long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** c. 1.5 mm. long, plano-convex, oblong-obovoid, light or dark brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex appressa most closely resembles *C. virgata* Sol. ex Boott, especially as the inflorescence of both species is a stiffly erect contracted panicle, further, both species have similar distinctly nerved utricles. However, *C. virgata* has more slender culms, narrower leaves and paler brown, less dense-flowered panicles. In *C. appressa* the utricles are > 2.5 mm long while those of *C. virgata* are < 2.5 mm long. On the Chatham Islands *C. appressa* appears to intergrade, or hybridise, with *C. virgata*.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. North Island (Cook Strait region only), South Island (scattered, more common in the southern regions), Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Antipodes Islands, Auckland Islands and Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku. Also New Caledonia, Australia and New Guinea. Naturalised around Auckland City.

HABITAT

Mostly coastal, extending to montane in the subantarctic islands. Preferring open situations, usually on the margins of peat bogs or peaty, slow-flowing streams.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae



Enderby Island. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Boulder Beach, Otago Peninsula. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

AUTHORITY

Carex appressa R.Br.

SYNONYMS

Carex appressa R.Br. var. appressa; Carex paniculata L. var. appressa (R.Br.) Cheeseman

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September–December

FRUITING

December–June

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and by the division of whole plants. Will tolerate most conditions but does best in full sun in a permanently damp soil. Rather variable and some horticultural selection is warranted. The typical form with stiffly erect, densely compacted inflorescences is perhaps the most attractive.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

CARAPP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 60-62

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NStr, RR Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025](#)" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.
- Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-appressa/>

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