Carex chathamica

COMMON NAMES
Chatham sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, IE, RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizomatous, short-creeping, stoutly tufted, dark green to orange green, leafy sedge of peat bogs and swampy ground. **Rhizomes** woody up to 10 mm thick, loosely covered in fibrous brownish-grey sheath remnants. **Culms** 0.05–0.35-1 m × 1.5–3–6 mm. trigonous, smooth, stout and sturdy; basal sheaths light- to chestnut-brown. **Leaves** not overtopping inflorescence, 6–8–10 mm wide, dark green to light green above, paler beneath, double-folded, margins slightly thickened, distinctly though finely serrate, especially toward the tapering apex; base of leaf neither sheathing or enlarged but marked by a distinct purple ligule. **Inflorescence** of 6–8–(12) simply, light brown spikes; uppermost 2–4 spikes male, these shorter and more slender than the female, more or less approximate; remaining spikes female with a few males near apices, 30–75–(90) × 10–15–(20) mm, erect on stout peduncles, both spikes and peduncles reducing in size toward distal end of inflorescence; subtending bracts leafy, > inflorescence, almost enclosing the peduncles with their sheaths. **Glumes** > utricles, linear-lanceolate, emarginated or entire, faintly nerved, membranous, light brown to dark brown or red purple (sometimes almost black), paler towards the margins, midrib pale brown prolonged as a long hispid awn. **Utricles** 3–4.5 × 2 mm, unequally biconvex, obovoid, turgid, pale green to brownish green, lateral nerves well-marked, otherwise smooth, margins glabrous, abruptly contracted to a narrow, deeply bidentate beak, slightly > 0.5 mm long, crura finely scabrid; stipe 0.5 mm long, white. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 2 mm long, pale grey-brown, trigonous, oblong-obovoid.



In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 29/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.



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SIMILAR TAXA
Carex chathamica is a distinctive species of peat bogs and peaty open clears within forest. From the three other wide-leaved species of *Carex*, (*C. trifida* Cav., *C. ternaria* Boott in Hook.f., and *C. ventosa* C.B.Clarke in Cheeseman) present in the Chatham Islands, *C. chathamica* is ecologically separated from all but *C. ternaria*. *Carex ternaria* is a species of lake margins, slow flowing streams, ponds and permanent pools within peat bogs, its range rarely overlaps with *C. chathamica* from which it can be easily distinguished by its much greater stature (up to 3 m tall) and by its solitary rather than geminate basal spikes. Though ecologically distinct from the forest dwelling *C. ventosa*, herbarium specimens have been confused. Thus, *C. chathamica* can be distinguished from *C. ventosa* by its distinctly long-rhizomatous tufted, rather than shortly rhizomatous tussock forming habit, dark green to orange green rather than light green to pale glaucous green leaves, glumes which exceed rather than equal the utricles in length, and much less distinctly nerved and beaked utricles.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Chatham Islands where present on Chatham (Rekohu), Pitt, and South East Islands.

HABITAT
Predominantly found in peaty ground such as bogs, in wet clearings, at the margins if streams, lakes and ponds, and in swamps.

THREATS
A biologically sparse species that is widespread, though never abundant on the Chatham Islands. In some places it is threatened by grazing and disturbance by stock and feral pigs.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex chathamica Petrie

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–December

FRUITING
November–March

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Best grown in permanently damp, peaty soils. Does well in cool, shaded sites, and is ideal around ponds or bordering streams. In the northern plant of New Zealand it has proved difficult to maintain and dislikes long periods of drought, humidity or both.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACW: Facultative Wetland
Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available

ETYMOLOGY
carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.
chathamica: From the Chatham Islands

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand

NVS CODE
CARCHA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.64

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, RR, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE
2004 | Sparse
Jump to current conservation status

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
Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).
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MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-chathamica/

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