

# Carex cirrhosa

## COMMON NAMES

curly sedge

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufted sedge forming dense wine red, silvery-grey or yellow-green tussocks. **Culms** 100–400 mm long, enclosed by light brown leaf sheaths.

**Leaves** 25–200 × 0.5–1.0 mm, basally wine-red, apically silvery-grey, narrow-linear, concavo-convex, margins incurved, scabrid, tip strongly curled and twisted. **Inflorescence** of 2–5 spikes buried within basal portion of plant; terminal 1–2 male, lower 1–3 female crowded round base of male spikes, 3–8 × 2 mm, lower most spikes often distant, pedunculate, bracts subtending female spikes leaf-like, > spikes. **Glumes** slightly < utricles, or = to utricule length if awned, ovate-lanceolate, acuminate, cuspidate, hyaline, white or pale pink, midrib often green. **Utricles** 2.0–3.0 × 1.0–1.5 mm, plano-convex, elliptic-ovoid, yellow-green in lower half and on beak, pinkish brown otherwise, nerved, sessile, margins smooth or minutely scabrid, abruptly narrowed to an acute bidentate beak 0.5 mm, crura scabrid. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** 1.5 mm, biconvex, oblong-ovoid, brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Easily recognised by the tufted, non-rhizomatous growth form and by the distinctly cirrhose (curled) leaves, which are wine-red (or green) for the lower third and then silvery white for the rest of their length. The spikelets are found hidden within the foliage toward the lower third of the culm. It is perhaps closest to *C. rubicunda*, which differs by its much smaller size, wider blunt-ended leaves, and smooth or faintly nerved utricles, which are <2 mm long and narrowed to a minute 0.3 mm-long beak.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North, South Island - mainly easterly. In North Island very local from Lake Whangape (near Huntly) to Lake Wairarapa. In the South Island in scattered sites from about North Canterbury to Southland.

## HABITAT

Lake, pond and tarn margins - preferring low marginal turf in sites subjected to seasonal inundation.

## THREATS

Habitat loss as a consequence of taller and faster growing weeds encroaching on the lake side marginal turf communities this sedge prefers. This species is also threatened by changes in lake levels and seasonal water regimes as a consequence of dams and water abstraction. Also browsed by hares.

## GENUS

Carex

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae



Lake Lyndon, Canterbury. Green form.  
Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 29/05/2020, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Lake Lyndon, Canterbury. Green form.  
Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 17/05/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## AUTHORITY

Carex cirrhosa Bergg.

## SYNONYMS

Carex cirrhosa var. lutescens Kük. in Cheeseman

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

October–January

## FRUITING

November–February

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and the division of whole plants. Prefers moist soils, with a sunny aspect, free from weeds.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found 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

CARCIR

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 68

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: RR

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, RR

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

2004 | Gradual Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, 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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

### **ATTRIBUTION**

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)  
Some of this factsheet information is derived from [Flora of New Zealand Online](#) and is used under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand](#) licence.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

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

### **PDF DATE**

27 May 2026