Carex coriacea

COMMON NAMES
cutty grass, rautahi

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizomatous; summer-green perennial, in coarse yellow-green, glossy, distant tufts, 0.2–1.2 m tall, borne on a hard, woody rhizome 5–12 mm diameter. **Culms** 1.5–3.0 mm diameter, trigonous, scabrid below inflorescence; basal sheaths membranous, grey-brown, yellow-brown or dull red-brown, margins shredding into fibres wrapped round the culm. **Leaves** much > culms, 4–9 mm wide, double-folded, stiff, coriaceous, hard, glossy, margins closely scabrid. **Spikes** 8–15, pendulous on filiform peduncles usually much > spike; 2–6 uppermost spikes male, 2–3 mm diameter, glumes hardly awned; remaining spikes female, occasionally male at the top, geminate or ternate, rarely quinate, lower spikes the longest, 20–100 × c. 5 mm. **Glume** (excluding awn) < utricles, narrow-ovate or obovate, with a short hispid awn, coriaceous, red-brown, margins narrow-hyaline; midrib broad, 3-nerved, light brown. **Utricle** 1.9–3.3 × 1.2–2.0 mm, unequally biconvex, orbicular or broadly ovoid, yellow-green or light grey-brown, green towards the tip, faintly nerved but with prominent lateral ridges, margins smooth, gradually narrowed to a short beak c. 0.3 mm long, orifice entire; stipe c. 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** slightly < 1.5 mm long, c. ¾ length of utricle, biconvex, orbicular or oblong-ovoid, dark brown to black.

Silica Springs. Photographer: Mike Wilcox, Licence: All rights reserved.

Silica springs track, Ruapehu. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Carex coriacea is allied to *C. ternaria* Boott, *C. lessoniana* Steud. and *C. geminata* Schkuhr. From all these species it is best distinguished by the glossy, yellow-green leaves, smooth, yellow-green utricle and by the nut which is usually c. ¾ the length of the utricle. Further *Carex ternaria* is confined to the Chatham and Subantarctic islands outside the range of *C. coriacea*, while ecologically *C. lessoniana* and *C. geminata* are more typical of lowland wetlands or damp sites within forest. Only rarely do the ranges of *C. lessoniana* and *C. geminata* overlap with *C. coriacea*.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North, South and Stewart Islands from Pureora and the Kaingaroa Plain south. In the South Island widespread though more common on the eastern side.

HABITAT
Coastal to alpine (up to 1600 m a s.l.). Usually in damp seepages in grassland or on swampy river flats, sometimes a persistent weed in pasture.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex coriacea Hamlin

SYNONYMS
Carex ternaria var. pallida Cheeseman, C. ternaria f. pallida (Cheeseman) Kük.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–December

FRUITING
December–May

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 established plants. However, because of its extensively rhizomatous nature it needs plenty of room to spread. Although a wetland species C. coriacea will grow well in most soils and moisture regimes. Does best in full sun.

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.
coriacea: Leathery

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

NVS CODE
CARCOR

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-coriacea/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026