

Carex decurtata

COMMON NAMES

sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Densely tufted bright green, bronze green to yellow-green, diminutive sedge of river terraces, lake and wetland margins. **Culms** 20–70 mm long, enclosed by light to dark brown leaf-sheaths almost to their apex. **Leaves** much longer than culms, 30–90 × 0.5–1 mm, almost flat bright green, bronze green to yellow-green, concavo-convex, almost flat, linear, rather rigid and coriaceous, margins scabrid, gradually tapering to a subacute apex, incurved when dry; sheaths twice as broad as lamina, pale brown with chartaceous to membranous margins. **Inflorescence** a crowded head of 3–5 spikes. **Spikes**: terminal spike male; lower spikes female, 4–8 mm long, ovoid or oblong-ovoid, greenish-brown, sessile or the lowermost rather shortly pedunculate; spikes subtended by leaf-like bracts which are longer than the inflorescence. **Glumes** ≤ utricles, ovate to orbicular, acute or with the midrib extended into a long scabrid awn, nerved, membranous, red-brown with a pale centre and margin, or pale straw-coloured. **Utricles** 2.5–3 × 1.5 mm, plano-convex to subtrigonal, broadly ovoid, light brown, turgid at the back, faintly nerved, spreading, margins thickened and serrated toward apex, beak 0.5 mm long, scabrid, crura acutely cleft, scabrid; stipe absent although utricle narrows towards base (a pseudostipe). **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 2 mm long, grey-brown, trigonous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Close to *C. hectorii* Petrie from which it differs by the light brown rather than dark brown utricles, densely tufted rather than spreading shortly rhizomatous habit, and bright green, bronze-green to yellow-green, rather than blue-green to red-green leaves.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island from Canterbury to Otago, mainly known from the Mackenzie Basin (particularly from Lakes Tekapo, Pukaki and nearby tarns).

HABITAT

A plant of lake, tarn margins, and river sides, preferring open stony ground or situations with little surrounding vegetation. Tolerant of long periods of water immersion.

THREATS

A naturally uncommon species largely confined to the intermontane basins of Canterbury and Otago. In some places it is now at risk from canalisation, dairy farming (irrigation mainly) and the resultant influx of exotic weed species. Its conservation status may require reassessment.

GENUS

Carex



Pisa Flats. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Dryland outwash plain, Mackenzie Basin. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 20/12/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex decurtata Cheeseman

SYNONYMS

Carex cryptocarpa Cheeseman

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–January

FRUITING

October–July

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown by division of whole plants and fresh seed. Somewhat fickle in dry or humid climates and does best in a small pot.

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.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand

NVS CODE

CARDEC

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Data Deficient | Qualifiers: Sp

2012 | Data Deficient | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPT, NR, NStr, PF, RR, Sp Help

Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available.

The 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

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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