

Carex inopinata

COMMON NAME

grassy mat sedge

SYNONYMS

None

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex inopinata Cook

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

NVS CODE

CARINO

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = c.60

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: DP, CD, Sp

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Eastern South Island from the upper Awatere River to Deep Creek and Tapanui, Southland.

HABITAT

Carex inopinata has been found in several different habitats, unified by their high fertility. These include riparian alluvial terraces under rohtu (*Lophomyrtus obcordata* (Raoul) Burret) forest, limestone and schist overhangs, and at a forest margin on a rubbly slope under shrubland. Occasional plants have been found at the base of limestone and schist rocks.



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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rhizomatous, widely creeping sedge forming diffuse mats. **Rhizomes** 0.5–0.8 mm diameter, bearing widely spaced, tufted, leafy culms up to 10 mm long; basal culm sheaths dull brown. **Leaves** grass-like, > culms up to 100 × 1 mm, dark green, channelled, margins distinctly scabrid toward apex. **Inflorescence** of 2–3 pedunculate spikes; terminal spike male, slender; 1–2 lower spikes female, 5–7-flowered; bracts subtending inflorescence, numerous, leaf-like. **Glumes** more or less equal to or just < utricles, ovate-lanceolate, papery membranous, often streaked with red, midrib extending into ascabrid awn. **Utricle** 6–7 mm, biconvex, ovate-lanceolate, basally light brown, grading to dark red-brown towards apex, nerves distinct, these light brown; beak very narrow, 3 mm long, deeply bifid, crura spreading, margins and orifice scabrid. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 2 mm, trigonous with distinctive rounded angles, oblong, grey-brown to brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex breviculmis and some hook sedge species are similar. From these *Carex inopinata* can be recognised by the presence of fine teeth on the upper leaf margins only near the tip and by the few large, non-hook bearing, red-brown utricles. *C. breviculmis* leaves are also wider and finely toothed for their entire length, and its spikelets are evenly spaced up the stem, while the utricles smaller. Sterile specimens of hook sedge species can be distinguished from *C. inopinata* by their leaves which are finely toothed for their entire length.

FLOWERING

October–January

FRUITING

November–February

LIFE CYCLE

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from rooted pieces and fresh seed. An unusual plant that makes an attractive ground cover for a semi-shaded site. This species does best in a well drained, moderately fertile soil. Although it rarely flowers and fruits, some clones in cultivation do so frequently. *Carex inopinata* is very drought tolerant.

THREATS

The diminutive stature and open, diffuse mat-forming habit increase this species vulnerability to introduced weeds. This species is intolerant of much competition from other taller or faster growing plants which is possibly why it favours semi-shaded situations. Some populations are threatened through recreational activities such as rock climbing.

ETYMOLOGY

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (31 August 2006): Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) - see also de Lange et al. (2010).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- de Lange PJ, Heenan PB, Norton DA, Rolfe JR, Sawyer JWD. 2010. Threatened Plants of New Zealand. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch. 471 p.
- 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.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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