Carex kirkii var. kirkii

COMMON NAMES
Kirk's sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shortly rhizomatous, bright to dark green densely tufted sedge. **Culms** much , rarely < utricles, ovate-lanceolate, acuminate or acute, membranous, light brown or almost colourless, midrib light green, prominent in the lowermost glumes and often scabrid towards the tip. **Utricles** 4.0–4.5 × c. 1 mm, plano-convex, elliptic-obovoid, ± papillose, strongly nerved slightly winged; beak 1.5–2.0 mm long, scabrid on the margins, orifice oblique, bifid; stipe minute or absent. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** c. 2 mm long, plano-convex, oblong, shortly stipitate.

SIMILAR TAXA
Carex kirkii var. *elatior* Kük. differs by the longer culms (up to 210 mm cf. 40 mm in var. *kirkii*) which elongate well above the leaves and surrounding leaf-sheaths at maturity rather than remain hidden amongst the leaf-sheaths; longer (up to 350 × 1.5 mm cf. 200 × 0.5 mm) involute or flattened rather than involute leaves; and longer (10–40 × c.5 mm cf. 10–15 × c. 5 mm) distinct rather than crowded spikes. Only occasionally are the lower-most spikes of var. *elatior* specimens subtended by a leaf-like bract, while in var. *kirkii* the whole inflorescence is almost always subtended by such a bract.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: South Island North-West Nelson, Marlborough, Canterbury and Otago.

HABITAT
Alpine (900–1900 m a.s.l.). Usually in snow-tussock (Chionochloa) grassland, associated herbfield and on semi-consolidated talus.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex kirkii Petrie var. kirkii

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

Old Woman Range (from a specimen collected by Graeme Jane). Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 23/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

Herbarium specimen: AK 2480. Photographed with permission of Auckland Institute and Museum. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 23/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November–December

FRUITING
December–February

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Winged utricles are dispersed by water, granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of established plants. Best planted in full sun in a free-draining, permanently damp soil within a rock garden, or grown in a pot. Dislikes humidity and will not flower in warmer, northern lowland situations.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY
Not Commercially Available

ETYMOLOGY
carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.
kirkii: After Thomas Kirk (18 January 1828 - 8 March 1898), a NZ botanist and lecturer in natural sciences and regarded as a leader of botanical enquiry in NZ for over three decades. One of his most significant publications was Forest flora of NZ (1889) but he also contributed over 130 papers to the Transactions and Proceedings of the NZ Institute and other journals.

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

NVS CODE
CARKVK

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.68-70

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient | Qualifiers: TL 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

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)
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MORE INFORMATION

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

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