Carex libera

COMMON NAMES
sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shortly rhizomatous; somewhat openly tufted, dingy reddish green, red to red-green sedge. **Culms** 10–80 × 1 mm, cylindrical, glabrous; shorter culms almost hidden by brownish leaf sheaths. **Leaves** > culms, up to 250 × 0.5–1 mm, rather spreading but not drooping, somewhat coriaceous, concavo-convex, paler on undersides, margins finely scabrid toward apex. **Inflorescence** of 3–5, close-packed, sessile spikes; terminal spike male, erect, usually reddish brown to brownish; subtending bracts numerous, leaf-like. **Glumes** (excluding awns) usually slightly less than utricles, ovate, often emarginated and cuspidate, reddish brown with a distinctly thicker green midrib, sometimes uniformly red-brown. **Utricles** 2–3 × 1–1.5 mm, plano-convex, ovoid-ellipsoid, light grey-green or yellow-brown toward base, spotted with red or dark red-purple in distinct patches toward apex, nerves distinct, whitish; beak rather short (up to 0.5 mm), slightly narrowed, usually spotted red-purple, margins glabrous, crura shortly bidentate to almost truncate, scabrid; stipe minute, scarcely narrower than utricle. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 1 × 1 mm. dark brown, obovoid, trigonous with rounded angles.

SIMILAR TAXA
Carex libera is closely allied to the three other reddish coloured sedges *C. edgariae* Hamlin, *C. filamentosa* Petrie and *C. uncifolia* Cheeseman, which all possess small, congested and approximate spikes. From these *C. libera* is closest to *C. edgariae* with which it shares similar concavo-convex leaves that are wider than 0.5 mm, and utricles that are scarcely beaked. From *C. edgariae*, *C. libera* can be recognised by the red-tipped rather than black-tipped utricles, and by the female glumes, which are almost the same or of equal length rather than ½ the length of the utricles. In *C. libera* the male glumes are usually reddish-brown and awned, while those of *C. edgariae* are creamy brown and usually entire.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. South Island, North West Nelson.

HABITAT
A species found in open, damp sites such as along stream sides, in seepages and around small pools, ponds, and tarns. Known to range from lowland to subalpine habitats. Often found in montane forest and in tussock grassland.

In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 21/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 21/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex libera (Kük.) Hamlin

SYNONYMS
Carex uncifolia Cheeseman. var. libera Kük.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–January

FRUITING
October–May

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown in pots and in an open, sunny but permanently damp situation. A very attractive small sedge well worth cultivating.

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
CARLIB

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.60

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 Data Deficient 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). 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-libera/

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