

Carex litorosa

COMMON NAMES

sea sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CI, DPR, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

An upright sedge to 800 mm tall (but usually smaller), that forms pale green or reddish, dense tussocks with curly tops. **Leaves** are flat on one side, curved on the other and slightly serrated along the edge, 1.5 mm wide and about the same length as the flower stem. **Flower stems** are cylindrical and upright, with light brown spikes.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex divisa, which also grows in saltmarshes but has blue-grey leaves, and smaller, compact black spikes borne on long stems near the apex of the leaves of each tussock.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island, South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT

Coastal in salty, brackish marshes and on sandy, tidal river banks.

THREATS

Habitat loss through coastal development. Encroachment by weeds is a serious problem in the North Island, especially from species such as spartina, tall fescue and *Carex divisa*.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex litorosa L.H.Bailey

SYNONYMS

Carex littoralis Petrie, Carex australis Kirk

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No



Awarua Bay, Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Pounaweia. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

December–April (but seedheads long persistent)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and by the division of whole plants. Very easy to grow in a range of substrates.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for April 2016](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

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

litorosa: From the Latin littus ‘shore’, meaning shore-loving or growing on the shore

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

CARLIT

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 48

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: RR

2009 | At Risk – Declining

2004 | Serious Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, Sp Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: CI, DPS, DPT, NStr, RR 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

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 for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 2 September 2003.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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