Carex penalpina

COMMON NAMES
bastard grass, hook 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 or loosely tufted, bright green, yellow-green or glaucous plants. **Rhizome** woody, 2–3 mm diameter **Culms** 80–400 × 0.7–2.0 mm, stiffly erect, scabrid below inflorescence; basal bracts dull reddish brown or dull dark brown. Leaves 4–7 per culm, < or ± = culms, 1.5–5.0 mm wide, rigid, curved to falcate, coriaceous, margins usually harshly scabrid but occasionally almost glabrous, upper surface near tip scabrid. **Spikes** 20–75 × 3–7 mm, linear to subclavate, occasionally bracteate, female flowers usually 10–15, mostly close-set, rarely rather lax, internodes to 6 mm long at base of spike, 2–3 mm long above. **Glumes** slightly >, = or slightly < utricles, persistent, ovate, obtuse or lowermost subacute, coriaceous, greenish brown, light brown or dull dark brown, rarely bright chestnut-brown, midrib broad, green, margins white, hyaline. **Utricles** 5.0–7.5 × 1.5–2.0 mm, plano-convex or concavo-convex, ovate or obovate, many-nerved, tapered above to a beak 1.5–2.0 mm long, slightly narrowed at the base to a stipe 1–2 mm long.



Mount Holdsworth, Tararua Range. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/02/2008, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Carex penalpina appears closely allied to the much less common, biological sparse *C. purpurata* (Petrie) K.A.Ford. Both species have leaf-sheaths, leaves and glumes without any red pigmentation, close-set flowers, utricles 1–2 mm diameter and wiry culms up to 500 mm long. From *Carex purpurata*, *C. penalpina* differs by the culms with are 0.7–2.0 mm rather than c. 0.5 mm diameter, and by the glumes which are more or less equal rather than ½–¾ the length of the utricles. *Carex purpurata* is confined to Otago where it is usually found under dry rock overhangs or in grey scrub, while *C. penalpina* is found in both North and South Islands and is ecologically more wide ranging (see Habitat).

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Volcanic Plateau, Kaimanawa, Ruahine and Tararua Ranges), South Island (widespread except in Westland) and Stewart Islands.

HABITAT
Upper montane to alpine. In sparse forest and subalpine scrub, snow-tussock and short-tussock grassland, herbfield, and on ultramafic rock, scree and fellfield.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex penalpina K.A.Ford

SYNONYMS
Uncinia fuscovaginata Kük.; Uncinia purpurata Petrie var. fuscovaginata Cheeseman, Uncinia fuscovaginata var. fuscovaginata, Uncinia fuscovaginata var. caespitans Hamlin

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Carex penalpina is a very variable species. A glaucous form apparently confined to the ultramafic rocks of the northern South Island is especially distinctive and may warrant further investigation.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–November

FRUITING
November–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of established plants, though these may take a while to settle. Prefers moist soil. Once established will tolerate a wide range of conditions. This species would repay critical horticultural investigation. The glaucous form found in northern South Island ultramafics is especially attractive.

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
CARPEN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 88

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 Not Threatened | 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.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970). Fact sheet prepared by Peter J. de Lange 17 August 2006. 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-penalpina/

PDF DATE

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