

Carex punicea

COMMON NAMES

red bastard grass, frost flat hook grass

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Dark red, wine-red or reddish green, weakly tufted or shortly rhizomatous plant. **Culms** 150–350 × < 1 mm, rigid, wiry, minutely scabrid on the angles under the inflorescences **Leaves** 2–5 per culm, much < to slightly > culm, 0.7–2.5 mm wide, rigidly flexuose to rigid, margins slightly scabrid, tapering rather abruptly towards the tip. **Spikes** 25–70 × 3–5 mm, usually ebracteate, female flowers 8–11, often aborted, internodes to 10 mm long at base of spike, 3–6 mm long above. **Glumes** = or < utricles, persistent, obtuse or lowermost subacute, coriaceous, red with a pale margin.

Utricles 5.0–6.5 mm long, plano-convex, concavo-convex or subtrigonus, fusiform, striated, yellowish green, later yellow-brown, narrowed above to a beak 1.0–1.5 mm long, and scarcely narrowed below to a paler stipe 1.0–1.5 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinctive species, easily recognised by the normally dark red to wine-red, rigid, wiry, weakly tufted culms. The species appears to be uniform throughout the North Island (populations there have leaves ½ the length of the culms and 1.0–1.5 mm wide), while in the South Island the leaves and culms are often slightly wider, and plants may occasionally be reddish-green.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura. From about Mt Pirongia and Te Urewera (though mainly found within the Central Volcanic Plateau) south. In the South Island present in Nelson thence east of the main divide.

HABITAT

Montane to alpine (coastal in southern part of range). In frost-flats, short and tall tussock grassland, grey and subalpine scrub, bogs and mires. In the North Island it has been very rarely collected from cloud forest (Mt Pirongia).

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex punicea K.A.Ford



Close-up of flowers. In cultivation ex Moawhango River. Nov 1975. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Nina Valley, Canterbury. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 19/04/2019, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SYNONYMS

Uncinia rubra Boott var. fallax Kük.; Uncinia rubra Boott

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–November

FRUITING

November–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of established plants, though these may take a while to settle. Prefers moist soil in a semi-shaded site. However, once established will tolerate a wide range of conditions. A very attractive species well worth cultivating. A red form of *Carex uncinata* L.f. is often sold erroneously labelled as this species.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (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

CARPUI

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 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

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

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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