

Carex rubicunda

COMMON NAMES

sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Diminutive, shortly rhizomatous, stiffly erect, reddish brown tufted sedge with curled leaf apices frequenting lake, pond, and tarn margins, flushes, slow flowing stream and seepage in montane to subalpine conditions.

Culms 10–150 × 0.5–1 mm, glabrous, terete, basal sheaths light brown to grey brown. **Leaves** much longer than culms, 30–300 × 0.5–1 mm, red to red-brown, rigid, plano-convex, occasionally with margins inrolled, striated on undersides, margins finely scabrid, leaf apex obtuse, twisted and curled when dry. **Inflorescence** 10–15 mm long, usually hidden within foliage towards base of plant. **Spikes** 3–4–(6), shortly pedunculate to almost sessile, pale yellow-brown, terminal spike wholly male, subterminal spike female or with some males near apex, remaining spikes female, 5–10 × 3 mm, clustered at the same level round base of male spike, all subtended by leaf-like bracts, these about same length as leaves.

Glumes slightly \leq utricles, ovate, membranous, nerved, pale pink, maturing brown, with green midribs, apices acute. **Utricles** 1.5–2 × 1 mm, plano-convex, obovoid, smooth or faintly nerved, gradually narrowed at either end, light brown below, trending to darker purple-brown toward the 0.3 mm long glabrous beak, apex hardly bifid, crura minutely scabrid; stipe 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** about 1 mm long, obovoid to suborbicular, pale grey-brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

In some respects *C. rubicunda* is perhaps closest to *C. petriei* Cheeseman from which it differs by its red, curly-tipped rather than twisted leaves, female flowers bearing 2 rather than 3 stigmas, and by the scarcely beaked rather than distinctly beaked, grey brown rather than dull brown, obovoid to suborbicular rather than oblong-obovoid, utricle. It could also be confused with *C. cirrhosa* Bergg., from which it differs by its (usually) smaller stature, and smooth or faintly nerved rather than distinctly nerved, utricle which tapers to a minute beak (0.3 mm long), rather than an abruptly narrowed utricle terminating in a > 0.5 mm long beak. The utricles of *C. rubicunda* are usually much < 2 mm long, whilst those of *C. cirrhosa* are typically > 2 mm long. The two species are occasionally found growing together.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North and South Islands. In the North Island known from swamps in the southern Kaingaroa Plain, the Kaimanawa and Ruahine Mountains, and wetlands within Tongariro National Park. Its exact distribution in the South Island is still unclear. It has long been known from from Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri, and in 2009–2010 was found at Lake Lyndon (Canterbury) and Lake Wanaka (Otago). It is likely to be found at other sites.



Green Form. Ex L. Wanaka. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Spider Lakes, Hakatere Conservation Area. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 21/02/2024, Licence: CC BY-NC-SA.

HABITAT

A species of mainly montane to subalpine lake, tarn, and pond margins. Also found in other ephemeral wetlands, often in places seasonally flooded.

THREATS

A locally common species of suitable habitats within the Central North Island. Some populations might be at risk from horse trampling, vehicle traffic and invasive wetland weeds. Status in the South Island needs clarification.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex rubicunda Petrie

SYNONYMS

Carex novae-zelandiae Petrie; Carex petriei Cheeseman var. rubicunda (Petrie) Kük.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–January

FRUITING

October–August

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from the division of whole plants and from fresh seed. A diminutive species best suited for cultivation in pots within an alpine house or in a rockery. It requires permanently moist soil to flourish and prefers full sun. It is intolerant of much competition and dislikes humidity.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for May 2015](#) for the full story.

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

CARRUB

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, EF, RR

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, RR

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, 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

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

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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