

Carex subtilis

COMMON NAMES

handsome bastard grass, handsome hook sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Data Deficient | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shortly rhizomatous, spreading sedge form loose turfs. **Rhizome** 1–1.5 mm diameter. **Culms** 40–300 × 0.5–1 mm, erect, usually glabrous, occasionally weakly scabrid just below inflorescence; basal bracts dull grey-brown. **Leaves** 4–10 per culm, < or ± = culms in length, 1–2 mm wide, soft, somewhat flaccid. **Spikes** 15–30 × 2–4 mm, cylindrical, ebracteate, female flowers about 10, close-set with lower ones usually lax. **Glumes** slightly < utricles, persistent, obtuse, coriaceous, straw-yellow with brown flecks and/or markings, or dark brown or brown tinged, midrib green. **Utricles** 4–5 × 1–1.5 mm, plano-convex, obovate-oblong, grey-brown with dark brown nerves, finely hispid on margins and both surfaces of upper half, beak tapering c. 1 mm long, stipe scarcely narrowed, 0.4–0.5 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Closest to *Carex parvispica* K.A.Ford from which it mainly differs by the narrower leaves, spikes and more distinctly nerved utricles. In *Carex subtilis* the glumes are often dark brown or brown tinged, those of *C. parvispica* are uniformly straw-coloured. *Carex subtilis* is smaller with narrower leaves, the spike is narrow, utricles not or little divergent and with truly scabrid (sometimes sparsely so) margin, glume usually a bit less than utricule. *Carex subtilis* prefers to grow in drier shady sites than *C. parvispica*. *Carex parvispica* is larger with wider leaves, spike wider, and the utricles divergent when mature with an almost ciliate margin, glume = utricule, and prefers damp situations.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. South Island, from Canterbury south through Otago to Fiordland. Also recorded from Tasmania.

HABITAT

A very uncommon upper montane to subalpine species of short tussock grassland, or shady locations under scrub and under low rock overhangs. Sometimes in open dry rocky ground.

THREATS

Believed to be a naturally uncommon, ecologically sparse species. However it is poorly known from large parts of its reported range. Further survey to ascertain its exact status is much desired.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex subtilis K.A.Ford

SYNONYMS

Uncinia elegans (Kük.) Hamlin; *Uncinia sinclairii* Boott var. *elegans* Kük.; *Uncinia macrolepis* Decne var. *elegans* (Kük.) Kük.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No



ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November–December

FRUITING

November–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown.

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

CARSUT

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 94

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, SO, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, SO

2009 | Data Deficient | Qualifiers: SO

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NR, NStr, PF, Sp, 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

Fact sheet prepared by Peter J. de Lange 17 August 2006. Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1979).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026