# Carex tenuiculmis

## COMMON NAMES
slender wine sedge

## BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT
Jump to previous conservation statuses

## CATEGORY
Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Burgundy-red tussock-forming sedge inhabiting wetlands and riparian habitats in the South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tussock forming sedge of wetland margins. **Rhizomes** short and spreading, not forming a trunck. **Leaves** 250–800 × 2.4–3.2 mm, ascending and spreading, channelled, soft, red, wine-red, or red-green, keel and margins scabrid. **Culms** 200–500 × 1.8–2.1 mm, glabrous to near triquetrous in lower part, scabrid and trigonous in upper part; similar in length to, or shorter than, the leaves; basal sheath up to 90 mm long, red or red-green, becoming straw-coloured when dry. **Inflorescence** 80–140 mm long, usually with a single proximal branch, without subtending bract; spikes 1.5–15 mm long; upper spikes crowded and more or less sessile; male florets distal. **Glumes** 2.1–3 × 1.9–2.2 mm, shorter than utricles, ovate, membranous, persistent, acuminate, light-brown, with a straw-coloured midrib, margins hyaline. **Utricles** 2.3–3.5 × 1.6–2.3 mm, broad or narrow, plano-convex, ovoid, turgid, light brown to brown, smooth, shining, nerves distinct at base; beak 0.5–0.8 mm long, entire or with minute crura; stipe 0.2–0.4 mm long, beak and upper part of utricle winged, with scabrid margins, cream to light brown. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** 1.7–2 mm long, biconvex, ovoid to obovoid, light-brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA
Closest to *C. secta* from which it differs by its non-trunked rather than trunked tussock forming habit, wine-red to red-green rather than green leaves which are 2.4–3.2 mm rather than 1.5–7 mm wide. In *C. tenuiculmis* the culms are 200–500 mm long, and in *C. secta* 250 mm – 1 m long. The inflorescence of *C. tenuiculmis* is spiciform, usually unbranched or with 1–2 short branches near the base, and 80–140 mm long, while that of *C. secta* is paniculiform with numerous long branches 200–600 mm long. The utricles of *C. tenuiculmis* are light brown to brown, with the margins strongly winged, scabrid and cream-coloured, and the apex either entire or with a minute crura. In *C. secta* the utricles are chesnut brown to dark brown with the margins weakly winged, scabrid and light brown to brown, and the apex with distinct or minute crura. *Carex tenuiculmis* has 2n = c. 66 chromosomes and *C. secta* 2n = c. 70.



Canterbury. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 29/03/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Carex tenuiculmis close up of spikelets, Ex Cult. Springs Junction. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 20/12/1986, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. South, Stewart and Chatham Islands (both Chatham Island (Rekohu) and Pitt Island).

## HABITAT
A sedge of lowland to montane slow-flowing stream sides, lake margins, tarns, ponds and associated wetland vegetation. This species usually grows in association with other carices including *Carex coriacea* Hamlin, *C. diandra* Schrank, *C. gaudichaudiana* Kunth, *C. secta* Boott and *C. virgata* Sol. ex Boott. It does not like tall vegetation.

## THREATS
Once regarded to be seriously threatened, critical survey throughout its range has located more populations, the majority of which occur in secure habitats and locations. The biological pattern of distribution now suggests that this species is usually uncommon and, while it can at times be locally common, it is more usually a minor (sparse) component of wetland systems. That said, it is evident that some populations, especially those in northern Canterbury are more at risk from development than others.

## GENUS
Carex

## FAMILY
Cyperaceae

## AUTHORITY
Carex tenuiculmis (Petrie) Heenan et de Lange

## SYNONYMS
Carex secta var. tenuiculmis Petrie

## ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS
No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

## FLOWERING
November–December

## FRUITING
January–May

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and by the division of established plants. A very attractive species now commonly seen in cultivation, though it is often sold incorrectly by commericial garden centres as *Carex ternaria* Boott, which it doesn't evenly remotely resemble! The medium-sized tussock forming habit, dark wine-red foliage and narrowly pendent spike-like inflorescences are particularly attractive. Though it does best in a sunny, permanently damp situation it can tolerant extremely dry conditions, although, ultimately in these locations it will not flourish.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (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
CARTEC

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.66

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP
2004 | Sparse
Jump to current conservation status

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPT, NStr, RR, Sp, TL Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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
Heenan PB, de Lange PJ, Murray BG. 1997. *Carex tenuiculmis* comb. et stat. nov. (Cyperaceae), a threatened red-leaved sedge from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 35(2)*: 159–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1997.10414152.
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 for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (30 August 2005). Description based on Heenan et al. (1997).

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Carex tenuiculmis Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-tenuiculmis/ (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-tenuiculmis/

## PDF DATE
21 July 2026