

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 trunk. **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 utricule 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 chestnut 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* $2n = c. 70$.

DISTRIBUTION

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



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.

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 commercial garden centres as *Carex ternaria* Boott, which it doesn't even 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 tolerate 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

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

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

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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25 May 2026