

Carex ternaria

COMMON NAMES

southern cutty grass, rautahi

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

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

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stoutly rhizomatous, widely creeping, robust sedge forming diffuse dark green to dark glaucous green clumps up to 3 m tall. Plants dying back to rhizomes in cold conditions. **Rhizome** 5–10 mm diameter, lignaceous, closely covered with red-brown sheaths. **Culms** 0.3–3.0 m tall, 3–5 mm wide, triquetrous, harshly scabrid; basal sheaths red-brown, margins shredding into fibres with age. **Leaves** > culms, up to 3.2 m long, 4–17 mm wide, double-folded, margins and keel finely scabrid. **Spikes** 7–18, in both sexes varying from 10–80 mm in length, distant, peduncles usually $\pm$ = or > spikes, stout, stiff and erect, or more slender and drooping; upper 2–7 spikes male, c. 4–6 mm diameter (excluding very prominent awns); lower spikes female, 5–8 mm. diameter, lowest spikes geminate or ternate.

Glumes of male spikes $\pm$ truncate to acute, with scabrid awns occasionally up to 10 mm long; glumes of female spikes (excluding awn) $\pm$ = utricle, narrow-lanceolate to elliptic-lanceolate, acute, red-brown, membranous, with lighter brown, broad midrib prolonged as a finely scabrid awn up to 6 mm long (awn occasionally very dark red). **Utricles** c. 2.0–3.0 $\times$ 1.5–2.0 mm., plano-convex to biconvex, elliptic-obovoid, $\pm$ turgid, light yellow-brown, sometimes red-brown towards the base, nerves 5 or more on each face, margins smooth; beak c. 0.2–0.4 mm long, often lighter brown, very narrow, orifice glabrous, very slightly bifid; stipe c. 0.3 mm long, narrow. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** 1.5–2.0 mm long, biconvex, obovoid, lustrous, brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

In its natural habitat *Carex ternaria* cannot be confused with any other carex species because it is allopatric from its closest relatives *C. coriacea* Hamlin, *C. geminata* Schkuhr, and *C. lessoniana* Steud. However, *C. ternaria* is now occasionally available from plant nurseries and distinction between it and these allied species is not always clear. The most obvious difference is stature as *C. ternaria* is much taller, regularly attaining heights of over 2 m up to a maximum of 3 m. Like *C. coriacea*, it is deciduous (though only in cold weather), and it differs from all three species by its much larger spikes and conspicuously awned glumes.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Chatham, Antipodes and Auckland Islands

HABITAT

Widespread along stream, lake and pond margins and in seepages, flushes, and around shallow ephemeral pools. Usually in open, well lit situations but also may be fringing streams running through successional forest.



Chatham Islands, Lake Rakeinui. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Chatham Islands, Lake Rakeinui. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex ternaria Boott

SYNONYMS

Carex martinii Petrie

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

December–July

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 whole plants. Prefers a permanently damp, acidic soil. Plants die back in cold conditions. An attractive sedge for a large garden where it should be planted on the margin of ponds or slow flowing streams.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found 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

CARTER

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = c.66

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

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

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) Some of this factsheet information is derived from Flora of New Zealand Online and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

MORE INFORMATION

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

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