

Carex testacea

COMMON NAMES

speckled sedge, trip me up

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Densely tufted, 0.3–0.6–(0.8) m high, usually dark red to orange-red sedge. **Culms** < or > leaves, often exceedingly elongated at maturity, up to 2 m long, trailing, prostrate, < 1 mm diameter, often almost filiform, trigonous or subtrigonous, glabrous or slightly scabrid below the inflorescence; basal sheaths dark brown or red-brown, nerves distinct.

Leaves 1.0–2.5–(3.0) mm wide, channelled, usually reddish or orange-green, sometime slight green, harshly scabrid. **Spikes** 3–5, ± approximate; terminal spike male, c. 1 mm diameter, ± = female spikes in length, on a filiform peduncle; remaining spikes female, 5–25–(30) × c. 5 mm, often with a few male flowers at the base, sessile, or the lowest more distant and shortly pedunculate. **Glumes** (excluding awn) ± = utricle, broadly ovate, thin and membranous, often deeply emarginate, occasionally entire, very light brown with darker flecks, midrib usually brown-spotted, produced to a scabrid awn of variable length. **Utricles** c. 2.5 × 1.5 mm, ± plano-convex, broadly ovoid, pale yellow-brown below, purple-brown above, nerved, more strongly so on the more convex face, shining, narrowed abruptly to the deeply bifid beak c. 0.5 mm long, margins and orifice usually finely scabrid, occasionally ± contracted below to a stipe c. 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** c. 1.5 mm long, biconvex, dark brown, almost black.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex testacea belongs to a complex of allied species which include the South Island, ultramafic endemic *C. devia* Cheesemanii, *C. raoulii* Boott, and *C. flagellifera* Colenso. From *C. devia* and *C. raoulii* it is best distinguished by its usually long trailing fruiting culms, narrow, mostly orange-red, or reddish-green, channelled leaves, and usually distant, pendent female spikes. It is morphologically closest to *C. flagellifera* (itself a species complex). From that species, at least in its typical form is differs by the usually orange-red to red-green, rather than yellow-green to dark green culms, and membranous, mostly light brown glumes bearing numerous fine, red-brown striae, rather than uniformly red brown to dark red-brown, subcoriaceous glumes. Forms of *C. testacea* from upland short-tussock grassland typically have wider leaves and shorter culms, and in some sites are difficult to distinguish from *C. wakatipu* Petrie.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North and South Islands. Uncommon in the South Island.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. In sand dunes, coastal forest and scrub, dense forest or short tussock (*Festuca novae-zelandiae* (Hack.) Cockayne) grassland.



Otama Beach, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



At Otama Beach, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex testacea Sol. ex Boott

SYNONYMS

None

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Carex testacea is extremely variable and is probably better regarded as a species complex. Plants of inland forests are usually much stouter, and have longer, darker brown spikes than those collected from coastal areas.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September–December

FRUITING

November–May (but may be present throughout the year)

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 division of established plants. Can be grown in full sun and deep shade but prefers a free draining soil. Forms with dark orange-red leaves and culms are very popular in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY

carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

testacea: From the Latin 'testa' tile, referring to either the hard quality of something or its yellow-brown colour like that of terracotta.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

CARTES

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = c.52

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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