

# Carex trifida

## COMMON NAMES

mutton-bird sedge, tataki

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT, PD, SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Extremely robust, compact, light green to glaucous sedge, producing tussocks up to 1 m diameter. **Culms** 0.15–1.00 m tall, 2–4 mm diameter, trigonous with angles rounded, glabrous; basal sheaths cream, grey, or yellow-brown. **Leaves** often overtopping the inflorescence, 6–15 mm wide, light green to dark glaucous green, double-folded, with keel not very much thickened, rather soft and spreading, margins slightly scabrid with rather distant teeth; sheath only slightly broader than lamina, paler green. **Spikes** 6–15, brown, very sturdy, 35–11 × 5–15 mm; upper 2–4 spikes male, occasionally with a few female flowers intermingled, ± approximate, ± sessile; lower spikes female, the lowest often compound, on stout erect peduncles; bracts leaf-like, > inflorescence. **Glumes** > utricles, linear-oblong, or lanceolate, noticeably emarginate, membranous, chestnut-brown, the pale greenish brown midrib produced to a very long hispid awn. **Utricles** 4.5–6.0 × c.2.0 mm., subtrigonus, oblong-obovoid, turgid, distinctly nerved, straw-coloured to light brown tinged; abruptly narrowed to a rather shallowly bifid beak c. 1 mm long, margins and orifice occasionally slightly scabrid; much contracted to a very pale brown stipe c. 1 mm long. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** c. 2 mm. long, trigonous, oblong-obovoid, dark brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Carex trifida* has no obvious close relatives in New Zealand, and of the few it frequently associates with, none, except the Chatham Island endemic *C. ventosa* Petrie, have any gross morphological similarity. From *C. ventosa*, *C. trifida* differs by its distinctly emarginate rather than acute or truncate, chestnut brown rather than mostly colourless, with red-brown striae glumes. Although *C. ventosa* is often weakly glaucous it rarely is the dark blue-green colour usually seen in *C. trifida*. *Carex ventosa* is normally a forest plant and *C. trifida* prefers open coastal sites, rarely however, do their distributions overlap, and there is some evidence they form hybrids.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand, southern South Island, Stephens Island / Takapourewa, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Snares Islands/Tini Heke, Antipodes Islands, Auckland Islands, Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku. Also present on Macquarie Island, in southern South America and the Falkland Islands.



Campbell Island. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Licence: CC BY-NC-SA.



Queens Park, Invercargill. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 05/11/2016, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## HABITAT

Strictly coastal where it often associated with seal haul outs and sea bird nesting grounds, especially—as the common name suggests—muttonbirds (*Puffinus* spp.). Usually in open sites, very rarely found in canopy gaps within coastal forest.

## THREATS

Not threatened but very uncommon in the northern part of its range

## GENUS

Carex

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae

## AUTHORITY

Carex trifida Cav.

## SYNONYMS

Carex rekohu Petrie

## TAXONOMIC NOTES

Based on nrDNA ITS sequences New Zealand plants are sister to the Chatham Island endemics *C. ventosa* Petrie and *C. chathamica* Petrie. No sequences of *C. trifida* seem to be available from its type locality, the Falkland Islands.

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

August–December

## FRUITING

November–June

## 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. Often naturalises in gardens. Prefers full sun and a damp, well manured, slightly acidic soil but will grow in almost any conditions except deep shade. A beautiful and popular sedge, widely grown in New Zealand.

## ETYMOLOGY

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

**trifida**: Divided into three

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

## NVS CODE

CARTRI

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 60

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CI, DPS, DPT, RR, Sp 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-trifida/>

## PDF DATE

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