Carex uncifolia

COMMON NAMES
sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shortly rhizomatous, dark purple red to beetroot red, densely tufted sedge 30–70 mm tall. **Culms** completely obscured by light grey-brown, chartaceous, somewhat fibrillose leaf-sheaths. **Leaves** 0.5 mm wide, dark purple-red, maroon red to beetroot red, much > culms, plano-convex, nerved on the undersides, smooth on the upper surface, margins scabrid, apex subobtuse, often curled. **Inflorescence** composed of short densely compacted spikelets, these 3–4–(5), terminal spike male, rather slender, shortly pedunculate, glumes lanceolate, acute, red-brown; remaining spikes female, these sessile, 5–12-flowered, glumes 3.5 × 1.5 mm, dull red-brown, distinctly nerved, lanceolate, acute with the mid rib extending into a scabrid awn. **Utricles** 2–3.5 × 1.5 mm, biconvex to obscurely trigonous, elliptic-lanceolate, spreading when mature, light red-brown, distinctly nerved, narrowed to a more or less scabrid beak 0.5–1 mm long, bidentate, orifice scabrid. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 1.5 mm long, dark grey-brown, obtusely trigonous, oblong-obovoid.



In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 28/02/2009, Licence: CC BY.


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SIMILAR TAXA
A well marked species distinguished from the closely allied *C. libera* (Kük.) Hamlin and *C. filamentosa* Petrie by the spikes which lie almost buried within the leaves, sessile female spikes and shortly rhizomatous habit. It could be confused with *C. hectorii* Petrie but that species has much wider, green or reddish-green leaves, and smooth, dark brown mature utricles.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Islands. In the North Island known only from the Central Volcanic Plateau from Mt Hauhangatahi and in the nearby Moawhango. In the South Island much more widespread known from the Red Hills, between the Wairau Valley and Nelson, south through Canterbury to Central Otago.

HABITAT
A species of damp seepages, open wetlands and damp turf within tussock grassland. Also abundant in damp sites overlying ultramafic rocks.

THREATS
Naturally uncommon, this species has a biologically sparse distribution, reaching its greatest abundance on ultramafites on the Red Hills, West Dome and the Livingston Range. Elsewhere it is uncommon and some populations have been lost due to weed invasion, trampling from horses and through vehicle damage.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex uncifolia Cheeseman

SYNONYMS
Carex cardrona Hamlin

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–January

FRUITING
October–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 division of whole plants and fresh seed. Best kept in a pot because it is intolerant of competition and slow growing. Deos best in a free draining, moist soil, enriched with magnesium. A very attractive and unusual sedge ideal for tub and pot cultivation on patios and verandahs

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
CARUNC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.60

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: RR, St, Sp
2012 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: RR, Sp, St
2009 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: RR, St, Sp
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPT, NStr, PF, RR, 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

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. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001.

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-uncifolia/

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