

Carex uncinata

COMMON NAMES

bastard grass, hook sedge, kamu, matau-a-maui

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Caespitose, yellow-green to dark green sedge. **Culms** 100–900 × 1.0–1.5 mm, glabrous, or occasionally scabrid just below inflorescence; basal sheaths dull brown. **Leaves** 5–10 per culm, ± = culms, or > flowering culms, 2–5 mm wide, dark green or occasionally reddish green, strongly scabrid on the margins and on the adaxial surface towards the tip. **Spikes** 55–200 × 2.0–3.5 mm, usually bracteate, female flowers numerous, usually c. 60–120, very closely crowded throughout almost the whole spike, internodes 0.5–1.5 mm long. **Glumes** usually < but occasionally slightly > utricles, deciduous, ovate, obtuse or subacute, coriaceous, yellowish with a green midrib or often entirely dark brown, occasionally greenish pink. **Utricles** 4–5 mm long, slightly > 1 mm. diameter, plano-convex or concavo-convex, lustrous, with usually one prominent lateral nerve on the abaxial face and 3–4 faint nerves on the adaxial face, yellowish to dull brown, stipe 1.0–1.5 mm. long, beak slightly > 1 mm. long; scarcely spreading when ripe.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex uncinata is the most variable of the New Zealand species. It is chiefly distinguished by the number of female flowers which range from 35–180, and by the length of spikes (55–200 mm long). The glumes of this species are also characteristically deciduous. However, some forms are known where the glumes are persistent. The leaves of *C. uncinata* are usually dark green to yellow-green but in the southern part of its range dark red colour forms are known.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous: New Zealand. North, South, Stewart, Chatham and Auckland Islands. Also in the Hawaiian Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane (up to 1000 m a.s.l.). Widespread and common in most indigenous habitats from dense forest to open shrubland. Rarely colonising the margins of wetlands. Sometimes found as an urban weed in hedgerows, along river banks or in parks.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex uncinata L.f.



Silverstream, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 10/02/2013, Licence: CC BY.



Glumes (abaxial, adaxial), utricles (abaxial, adaxial). Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 17/02/2008, Licence: CC BY.

SYNONYMS

Uncinia uncinata (L.f.) Kük.; *Uncinia australis* Pers.; *Uncinia alopecuroides* Colenso; *Uncinia bractata* Colenso; *Uncinia pedicellata* Kük.; *Uncinia uncinata* var. *pedicellata* (Kük.) Petrie; *Uncinia australis* var. *pedicellata* (Kük.) Petrie; *Uncinia uncinata* var. *laxior* Carse;

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August–December

FRUITING

Throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and by the division of established plants (though these may then take a while to settle). In the southern part of its range *C. uncinata* plants are often dark wine-red, it is this form which is erroneously sold as *Uncinia rubra* in the horticultural trade.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

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

uncinata: Hooked

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

CARUCN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 88

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

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

de Lange PJ, Heenan PB, Rolfe JR. 2013. *Uncinia auceps* (Cyperaceae): a new endemic hooked sedge for the Chatham Islands. *Phytotaxa* 104(1): 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.104.1.2>

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (18 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) - see also de Lange et al. (2013).

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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