

Carex wakatipu

COMMON NAMES

sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shortly rhizomatous; very variable in size, tufts dark green, reddish green or yellow-green. **Culms** 40–500 × c. 1 mm, subtrigonus, glabrous or occasionally faintly scabrid below inflorescence, sunk among the leaves or sometimes elongating far beyond the leaves and drooping; basal sheaths dark brown or red-purple, nerves ± distinct. **Leaves** 2–4 mm wide, ± erect or spreading, channelled, margins scarcely scabrid at base with well-spaced teeth towards tip. **Spikes** 4–(6), closely packed, at about the same level on the culm; terminal spike male, much more slender than and usually > female spikes; female spikes male at the base and occasionally at the top, 10–20 × c. 5 mm, shortly pedunculate. **Glumes** slightly < utricles, broadly ovate, usually emarginate, sometimes almost entire, occasionally red-brown, usually very light brown flecked with darker brown striae, membranous, midrib very broad, very pale brown, produced to a short scabrid awn. **Utricles** 2.5–3.0 × c. 2.0 mm, plano-convex or unequally biconvex, broadly elliptic-ovoid, pale brown flecked with red-brown striae below, or darker brown throughout, occasionally almost black, turgid, nerved, margins usually glabrous; beak c. 0.3 mm long with a broad, ciliate, shortly bifid orifice; stipe c. 0.2 mm long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** slightly > 1.5 mm long, biconvex, almost orbicular.

SIMILAR TAXA

Vegetatively *Carex wakatipu* is extremely variable. It is chiefly recognised by a combination of having dark green, yellow-green or reddish green channelled leaves which are distinctly keeled on the lower surface; a closely packed (congested) inflorescence with female spikes 10–20 × c. 5 mm; and very broad glumes and utricles. The utricles are distinctly turgid. Nevertheless these characters encompass a wide range of variation with respect to growth habit, and whether or not the culms elongate at maturity or remain hidden within the leaves. Much of this variation appears genetic, and distinct races (some of which are sympatric) exist which could be segregated from this species.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island except apparently Fiordland. Scarce in Westland.

HABITAT

Mostly upper montane to alpine (450–1800 m a.s.l.). The most commonly encountered, large carex sedge found in snow-tussock (*Chionochoa*) grassland, though it can at times be abundant in short-tussock grassland. It has occasionally been collected from quite low elevations (< 450 m a.s.l.) on lake margins.



Old Man Range. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Mt Cardrona, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex wakatipu Petrie

SYNONYMS

None

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Carex wakatipu as currently circumscribed is extremely variable and it is likely that further entities may be segregated from it in the near future.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

November–April

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from the division of whole plants and from fresh seed. Best suited for a well drained, sunny site but permanently damp situation. This species dislikes humidity.

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

CARWAK

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: 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.

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-wakatipu/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026