Chionochloa bromoides

COMMON NAMES
coastal tussock, seabird tussock

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Gynodioecious, stout, pendent often sprawling, bright green tussock with persistent leaves and sheaths. **Leaf-sheath** to 150 mm, shining yellow, keeled, persistent and entire, becoming fibrous, margin abundantly long hairy below, apical tuft of hairs to 4 mm; adaxially with many minute interrib hairs. **Ligule** to 1.5 mm. Leaf-blade to 500 × 10 mm, flat or shallowly U-shaped, smooth, persistent, adaxially glabrous except for long hairs on margin below and some short or long hairs, sometimes dense, at base. **Culm** to 700 mm, internodes glabrous. **Inflorescence** to 200 mm, very congested; rachis and main branches glabrous but with some long hairs at axils; pedicels short and densely hairy. **Spikelets** of up to 6 florets. **Glumes** acute or slightly awned, < adjacent lemma lobes, many prickle-teeth abaxially and a few adaxially; lower to 12 mm, 1–3-nerved, upper to 16 mm, 5-nerved. **Lemma** to 9 mm; hairs dense at margin and in all internerves though sometimes absent from all or some, less than or equal to sinus, prickle-teeth abundant abaxially and adaxially on lobes and margins; lateral lobes to 5 mm including awn to 3 mm or acute, rarely dividing from awn at sinus; central awn to 22 mm from indistinct straight column. **Palea** to 10 mm, prickle-teeth abaxially and on flanks. **Callus** to 1.5 mm, hairs to 5 mm. **Rachilla** to 0.5 mm. **Lodicules** to 1.75 mm. **Anthers** to 5.5 mm in male-fertile flowers, up to 3 mm in male-sterile flowers. **Male-fertile** flowers with stigma-styles to 3.5 mm, ovary to 1.5 mm. **Male-sterile** flowers to 5 mm, ovary 1.5 mm. **Seeds** to 3.5 mm.

Central Valley mouth, Fanal Island. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Maunganui Bluff (November). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island where virtually confined to northern offshore islands and easterly headlands from the Bay of Islands south to the Poor Knights, Chickens and Mokohinau Islands. One westerly outlier occurs at Maunganui Bluff.

HABITAT
Coastal on cliff faces, bluffs, rock stacks, and in petrel scrub. Well established plants often have their bases heavily burrowed by sea birds such as diving petrels.

THREATS
Not Threatened. Listed because it is a naturally uncommon, regional endemic.

GENUS
Chionochloa

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Chionochloa bromoides (Hook.f.) Zotov

SYNONYMS
Danthonia bromides Hook.f.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–December

FRUITING
November–March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Florets are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Can be difficult. Best grown from fresh seed. Plants should be planted where they are to grow as they resent much root disturbance. Best in full sun, in a freely draining soil or on a stone wall. Dislikes humidity.

ETYMOLOGY
chionochloa: Snow grass

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the grasses of New Zealand

NVS CODE
CHIBRO

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: RR 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Christchurch, Manaaki Whenua Press. 650 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

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/chionochloa-bromoides/

PDF DATE

09 July 2026