

Chionochloa ovata

COMMON NAMES

squat snow tussock, Fiordland snow tussock

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, CD, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Sparingly tufted tussock with shoots clothed in many old, fibrous, entire sheaths; flowering shoot taller than the leaves which eventually disarticulate at ligule; sheaths, culms, spikelets often purpled or golden.

Leaf-sheath to 100 mm, persistent, entire, prominently ribbed, inter-rib hairs minute, apical tuft of hairs to 2 mm. **Ligule** to 3.5 mm. **Leaf-blade** to 250 × 5 mm, flat, disarticulating at ligule, spiralling above, pungent, abaxially glabrous, adaxially with scattered prickle-teeth; margin smooth or sometimes with prickle-teeth. **Culm** to 450 mm, internodes glabrous except for hairs below inflorescence. **Inflorescence** to 100 mm, shortly branched; rachis, branches and pedicels long hairy. **Spikelets** of up to 8 strongly purpled florets. **Glumes** > adjacent lemma lobes; lower to 11 mm, 1–5-nerved, acute, sometimes bifid, upper to 16 mm, 3–5–7-nerved, acute. **Lemma** to 8 mm; hairs dense on margin and aside central nerve, usually glabrous elsewhere, < sinus; lateral lobes to 7 mm acute, or produced into awn up to 5 mm, or long triangular-acute; central awn to 20 mm divergent from 1.5 mm flat column. **Palea** to 9 mm. **Callus** to 1 mm, hairs to 3 mm. **Rachilla** to 0.75 mm. **Lodicules** to 1 mm. **Anthers** to 3 mm. **Ovary** to 1 mm; stigma-styles to 2.5 mm. **Seed** to 3.25 mm.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (Fiordland).

HABITAT

Subalpine to alpine. Inhabiting wet or seasonally poorly drained ground within grasslands. Also colonising damp sites within rock crevices.

THREATS

A very widespread Fiordland endemic. No serious threats to this species are known.

GENUS

Chionochloa

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Chionochloa ovata (Buchanan) Zotov

SYNONYMS

Danthonia ovata Buchanan; Danthonia planifolia Petrie



Purplish florets, Mount Burns, Fiordland.
Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken:
13/02/2016, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Mt Burns, Fiordland, January 2023.
Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken:
14/01/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

December–April

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Florets are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Prefers a permanently damp, acidic soil and semi-shade. Plants must never be allowed to dry out.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

chionochloa: Snow grass

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to the grasses of New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

CHIOVA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD, DP, RR, Sp

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NR, 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

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

ATTRIBUTION

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/chionochloa-ovata/>

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