# 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.

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.

## 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

## 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
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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)
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/chionochloa-ovata/

## PDF DATE

09 July 2026