

Chionochloa rubra subsp. rubra

var. rubra

COMMON NAMES

red tussock

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tall, slender, red tussock with crowded, erect, stiff, rush-like leaves.

Leaf-sheath to 300 mm, dark brown, keeled, incurving, fracturing into short segments, internerves glabrous or long hairy, margin scabrid, separating and coiling, apical tuft of hairs to 3 mm. **Ligule** to 1 mm. **Leaf-blade** to 1 m long and 1.2 mm diameter, falling with part of sheath, red to red-brown, acicular rush-like, splitting longitudinally, keel hollow, undersides glabrous but infrequently with long hairs near base, prickle-teeth towards apex, upper surface with rows of short hairs at base, and prickle-teeth; margin scabrid, with long hairs below, and prickle-teeth above. **Culm** to 1.5 m, internodes glabrous, sheath glabrous.

Inflorescence to 45 cm, open on pulvinate branches, glabrous except for long hairs at branch axils and short stiff hairs below spikelets, rarely becoming scabrid above. **Spikelets** of up to 9 florets. **Glumes** glabrous, acute, infrequently awned, less than or equal to adjacent lemma lobes, lower to 12 mm, 1–3–5-nerved, upper to 14 mm, 3–5–7-nerved. **Lemma** to 5 mm; hairs dense on margin, usually absent or sparse elsewhere, < sinus; lateral lobes to 6 mm including awn to 3 mm, rarely unawned; central awn to 13 mm from twisting column to 3 mm. **Palea** to 8 mm. **Callus** to 1.5 mm, hairs to 4 mm. **Rachilla** to 0.75 mm. **Lodicules** to 1 mm. **Anthers** to 3.5 mm. **Ovary** to 1 mm; stigma-styles to 4 mm. **Seeds** to 3.5 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Chionochloa rubra subsp. *rubra* var. *inermis* Connor has greenish leaves with papillate upper surfaces and smooth margins and is an allopatric variant endemic to Mt Taranaki or Mt Egmont. Distinguished from the other subspecies of *C. rubra* by the upper leaf surface, which just above the ligule bears short hairs or is completely glabrous and by the abundant prickle-teeth along the leaf margin.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Volcanic Plateau southwards), South Island (Marlborough and North Canterbury (scarce)).

HABITAT

Subalpine to alpine (rarely upper montane). Often the dominant of tussock grassland, also found within shallow bogs or fringing the margins of deeper bogs and small ponds, tarns and slow flowing streams. Occasionally in canopy gaps in upper montane forest or within subalpine scrub.

GENUS

Chionochloa



In cultivation. Dec 2001. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Licence: CC BY.



Tongariro, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Chionochloa rubra Zotov subsp. *rubra* var. *rubra*

SYNONYMS

Danthonia antarctica var. *delta minor* Hook.f.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

November–May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and the division of whole plants. However, can be slow growing and dislikes warm, humid climates and drought. Though once established it can take plenty of abuse. The reddish leaves are especially attractive.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

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

ETYMOLOGY

chionochloa: Snow grass

rubra: Red

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

CHIRRR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

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

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (June 2005). 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-rubra-subsp-rubra-var-rubra/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026