

# Chionochloa spiralis

## COMMON NAMES

Fiordland snow tussock, spiral-leaved snow tussock

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPT, PD, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Slender tussock with narrow leaves falling and leaving inwardly spiralling sheaths. **Sheaths** to 200 mm, glabrous, pale, chartaceous, spiralling and breaking into short segments, margin hairy above, apical tuft to 3 mm.

**Ligule** to 1 mm. **Lamina** to 500 × 1 mm, acicular junceous, veins few, falling with part of sheath, abaxially with occasional long (2 mm) hairs below, adaxially with dense weft of long (3 mm) hairs at base projecting over smooth margin, scattered prickly teeth above. **Culm** to 650 mm, internodes glabrous. **Inflorescence** to 120 mm, narrow, glabrous except for occasional long hairs at axils. **Spikelets** of up to 7 florets. **Glumes** glabrous, > adjacent lemma lobes, acute or shortly awned; lower to 12 mm, 3-nerved, upper to 13 mm, 3–5-nerved. **Lemma** to 5 mm; hairs dense on margin fewer aside central nerve, glabrous or sparsely hairy elsewhere, < sinus; lateral lobes up to 4.5 mm, long triangular-acute; central awn up to 13 mm divergent from 2.5 mm flat column. **Palea** to 6 mm. **Callus** 0.5 mm, hairs to 3 mm. **Rachilla** to 0.8 mm. **Lodicules** to 0.75 mm. **Anthers** to 4 mm. **Ovary** to 0.75 mm, stigma-styles to 4.5 mm. **Seeds** not described.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (Fiordland (Takahe Valley (Murchison Mountains); Lake Monk (Cameron Mountains); Mt Luxmore (Kepler Mountains)).

## HABITAT

Upper montane to subalpine. On and around limestone bluffs, talus and associated soils.

## THREATS

Naturally Uncommon. A narrow range endemic of limestone substrates within Fiordland National Park. Known populations are small and some are being impacted upon by deer. However, there is insufficient evidence to satisfactorily assess this species as being threatened. Further field work and monitoring to resolve this uncertainty is much desired.

## GENUS

Chionochloa

## FAMILY

Poaceae



Flowering. Photographer: Kelvin Lloyd, Licence: All rights reserved.



Limestone Bluffs in Takahe Valley. Photographer: Kelvin Lloyd, Licence: All rights reserved.

## AUTHORITY

*Chionochloa spiralis* Zotov

## SYNONYMS

None (first described in 1963)

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

November–January

## FRUITING

January–May

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and from rooted pieces but very slow to establish. Prefers a damp soil, and is best grown in semi-shaded conditions. In the northern part of its New Zealand this species rarely flowers.

## WHERE TO BUY

Not Commercially Available

## PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for February 2008](#) for the full story.

## ETYMOLOGY

**chionochloa**: Snow grass

**spiralis**: From the Latin *spira* 'coil' or 'twist' and *-alis* 'resembling', resembling a twist or corkscrew, spiral-shaped

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

## NVS CODE

CHISPI

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, PD, RR

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD, RR

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Range Restricted

[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-spiralis/>

### **PDF DATE**

27 May 2026