

Chionochloa vireta

COMMON NAMES

snow tussock

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

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

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Delicate, gracile tussock with hairy, stramineous sheaths. Leaf-sheath to 100 mm, very hairy, entire, margins often undulose, apical tuft of hairs up to 3.5 mm. **Ligule** 0.5 mm. **Leaf-blade** up to 300 × 2.5 mm, more or less flat, to U or V-shaped, strongly keeled, twisting above, disarticulating at ligule, abaxial surfaces prickled toothed, adaxial also with prickle-teeth; margin with long hairs below, these becoming prickle-toothed or rarely, otherwise glabrous and smooth. **Culm** to 600 mm, slender, internodes glabrous. **Inflorescence** to 130 mm, glabrous except for long hairs at branch axils. **Spikelets** golden and purple, comprising up to 8 florets. **Glumes** usually less than nearest lemma lobes; lower to 10 mm, 1–3–5-nerved, upper to 11 mm, 3–5–7-nerved. **Lemma** 5.5 mm or less; hairs dense on margins and astride central nerve, sparse or absent otherwise; lateral lobes to 4 mm, shortly awned or triangular-acute; central awn to 7 mm arising from a flat, rarely twisting, column to 2 mm. **Palea** 7 mm or less. **Callus** to 1 mm, hairs to 2.5 mm. **Rachilla** to 1 mm. **Anthers** 3.5 mm. **Ovary** 1 mm, stigma-styles 2 mm. **Seed** 2 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *C. pallens* subsp. *cadens* Connor by its slender, gracile (rather than stout) habit, thin almost membranous, undulose (rather than firm and flat) sheath margins; and by the flat leaf-blade which is up to 2.5 mm rather than 10 mm wide.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island from southern Canterbury to Fiordland.

HABITAT

A sparse component of upper montane to subalpine tussock grasslands (1200–1600 m. a.s.l.).

THREATS

Rather widespread but never particularly common. There is no evidence that the species is threatened but it is poorly known by field workers that the species might be better treated as Data Deficient until further surveys have clarified its status.

GENUS

Chionochloa

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Chionochloa vireta Connor

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes



ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Unknown

FRUITING

Unknown

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown

ETYMOLOGY

chionochloa: Snow grass

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to the grasses of New Zealand

NVS CODE

CHIVIR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

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

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NS, NStr, RR, St 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.

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-vireta/>

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