

# Eleocharis gracilis

## COMMON NAMES

slender spike sedge

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial or semi-aquatic sedge forming green to red-green tufts.

**Rhizomes** widely creeping, 1–3 mm diameter, loosely ensheathed at each nodes by conspicuous dark maroon, obtuse bracts with broad membranous margins. **Culms** densely tufted to widely spaced (or set close together in a linear series), 20–400 × 0.5 mm, erect or curved; sheaths membranous, with maroon to purple markings and an oblique orifice. **Spikelets** conspicuous, 3–8 × 1–4 mm, 5–20-flowered, ovoid to almost lanceolate, subacute. **Glumes** oblong, obtuse, 1-nerved, membranous, margins often very broad. **Hypogynous bristles** 4–8, usually > nut. **Stamens** 3. **Style** 3-fid. **Nut** slightly < 1.5 mm long, slightly < 1 mm diameter, trigonous, obovoid, light to dark brown, smooth, surmounted by the pyramidal, persistent style-base.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Most likely to be confused with *Eleocharis pusilla* R.Br. from which it differs by widely creeping rather than ascending rhizome; by the spikelets > 3 mm long (rather than 2.5–3 mm long); hypogynous bristles 4–8 (rather than absent or occasionally 2–3); and by the smooth nut (rather than nut with the surface covered in prominent vertical ribs and fine transverse bars). *Eleocharis gracilis* and *E. pusilla* may at times be sympatric.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In New Zealand present in the North Island, South Island, Chatham Islands and Stewart Island/Rakiura. Present in Australia and Norfolk Island.

## HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. A species of usually open situations on permanently damp ground such as lake, pond, tarn, stream and river sides, and wetlands.

## GENUS

Eleocharis

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Eleocharis gracilis* R.Br.

## SYNONYMS

*Eleocharis gracilis* R.Br. var. *gracillima* Hook.f.; *Eleocharis gracilis* R.Br. var. *radicans* Hook.f.; *Eleocharis cunninghamii* Boeck.; *Eleocharis gracillima* (Hook.f.) Hook.f.; *Eleocharis hookeri* Boeck.



Coromandel, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Waikuku Beach. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Licence: All rights reserved.

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

August–January

## FRUITING

October–May

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Bristly nuts are dispersed by water and possibly wind and attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Prefers a permanently damp situation in full sun.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

## ETYMOLOGY

**eleocharis**: Charm of the swamp

**gracilis**: Slender

## NVS CODE

ELEGRA

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 20

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, SO Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 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**

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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### **MORE INFORMATION**

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/eleocharis-gracilis/>

### **PDF DATE**

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