

# Eleocharis sphacelata

## COMMON NAMES

kutakuta, spikes of doom, bamboo spike sedge, tall spike sedge

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

**Rhizome** 10–15 mm diameter, stout and lignaceous, creeping. **Culms** 0.3–1.2 m long, 4–12 mm diameter, usually close-packed, linear with obvious internal transverse septa set at regular intervals of 10–100 mm, apices blunted-ended unless fertile. **Basal sheaths** grey, chartaceous with an oblique orifice. **Roots** 2 mm diameter, red-brown, in a group of up to 5 from the base of each culm. **Spikelet** 20–70 × 5–10 mm, cylindrical with an acute apex. **Glumes**: lowest glume sterile, almost completely surrounding base of spikelet, very short; upper glumes numerous, imbricate, 6–8 mm long, obovate-oblong, obtuse, not keeled but with a strong median nerve and numerous fine lateral nerves. **Hypogynous bristles** 6–10, usually greater than nut, with rather large, sparse, retrorse teeth. **Stamens** 3. **Style** 3-fid, occasionally stigmas 2, or all connate to the apex. **Nut** 2.0–2.5 mm long (excluding persistent style-base), orbicular, biconvex, the surface covered with hexagonal reticulations, pale brown, surmounted by the persistent, dark brown, conic, swollen base of the style.

## SIMILAR TAXA

None. Easily distinguished from other species of *Eleocharis* by the much large soft, hollow, transversely septate culms. Could be confused with sterile specimens of *Machaerina articulata* but that species has much longer (up to 2 m), dark green to almost brown green, rigidly firm culms with acute rather than blunt-ended apices.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous

## HABITAT

Coastal to lower montane (but mainly in lowland areas). Preferring sunny situations where it usually grows in still deep water such as along lake and pond margins often amongst raupō (*Typha orientalis* C.B.Presl), *Machaerina articulata* (R.Br.) Koyama. Rarely bordering slowly flowing streams and rivers, or in burn pools and damp depressions within peat bogs.

## GENUS

Eleocharis

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae



Eleocharis sphacelata. Photographer: Wayne Bennett, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## AUTHORITY

*Eleocharis sphacelata* R.Br.

## SYNONYMS

None

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

August–December

## FRUITING

November–May

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Can be tricky. Fresh seed germinates best if allowed to float on water overlying potting mix, gradually reduce the water level so that the germinating plants can naturally “float” on to the underlying soil. Plants do best if their rootstock is submerged.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

## CULTURAL USE/IMPORTANCE

The long culms, when dried, were sometimes used by Māori for tukutuku panels.

## ETYMOLOGY

**eleocharis:** Charm of the swamp

**sphacelata:** Diseased (appearance of the spike)

## NVS CODE

ELESPH

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 100

## 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 Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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 Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, OL 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)

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/eleocharis-sphacelata/>

## PDF DATE

07 June 2026