

# Eleocharis sphacelata

## COMMON NAME

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

## SYNONYMS

None

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae

## AUTHORITY

Eleocharis sphacelata R.Br.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## NVS CODE

ELESPH

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 100

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## 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 Raupo (*Typha orientalis* C.B.Presl), *Baumea articulata* (R.Br.) Blake. Rarely bordering slowly flowing streams and rivers, or in burn pools and damp depressions within peat bogs.



Whangapoua, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



Eleocharis sphacelata. Photographer: Wayne Bennett

## FEATURES

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 x 5-10 mm, cylindrical with an acute apex. 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 species of *Baumea 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

## FLOWERING

August - December

## FRUITING

November - May

## LIFE CYCLE

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.

## ETYMOLOGY

**eleocharis:** Charm of the swamp

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

## CULTURAL USE

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

## ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I. Government Printer, Wellington.

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora.

Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309

## MORE INFORMATION

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