

Festuca contracta

COMMON NAMES

Subantarctic fescue

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Evaluated

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufted tussock with pale, flabellate intravaginal branches of many smooth leaf-blades often exceeding the compact, short, stiffly erect, branched purple suffused inflorescences of many few-flowered, compact spikelets with shortly prickly-toothed lemmas. **Shoots** dimorphic, narrow if vegetative, swollen if reproductive. **Prophyll** 40–50 mm, stramineous, pointed, keels antrorsely ciliate, interkeel antrorsely hairy. Branching intravaginal. **Leaf-sheath** 50–100 mm, glabrous, stramineous, strongly nerved, margins membranous; apical auricles 0.4–0.5 mm, ciliate, symmetrical. **Ligule** as for auricles. **Leaf-blade** 120–250 × 0.8–1.0 mm, glaucous, glabrous, stiff, acute, terete or shallowly compressed-terete, adaxially and on margins bearing numerous short, white, antrorse hairs. **Culm** 120–400 mm long, nodes hidden, internodes finely antrorsely prickly-toothed and very shortly hairy, almost always hidden. **Panicle** 50–130 mm, narrow, compact, spiciform, with 13–15 nodes obscured by 20–50 spikelets; branches mostly binate, erect, stiff, very close-set, overlapping, > nearest internode, not naked below, basal branch appressed, 20–40 mm, of 5–7 spikelets, uppermost 5–7 solitary, on 1 mm pedicels; rachis, branches and pedicels margins shortly, densely prickly-toothed, elsewhere frequently bearing antrorse, fine hairs. **Spikelets** 9–12 × 1.5–1.8 mm, narrow, of 3 florets; glumes, lemmas, paleas purple suffused above; lemma included, awns exserted. **Glumes** ± equal, 8–11 mm, 3-nerved, upper prominently so, centrally green, prickly-teeth on keel and above, margin hyaline, finely ciliate. **Lemma** 7 mm, lobes small (0.25 mm), 5-nerved sometimes evident, abundant small uniform prickly-teeth present throughout; awn 1.5–2.5 mm. **Palea** 6.5–7.0 mm, much less than lemma, apex bifid (0.2–0.4 mm), ciliate; keels toothed ± to base, interkeel hairs to base, flanks shortly prickly-toothed in upper ½. **Callus** 0.1–0.2 mm long, shortly bearded near rachilla; articulation flat. **Rachilla** 1.00–1.25 mm, shortly, stiffly hairy. **Anthers** 0.6–0.8 mm, purple. **Ovary** 1.00–1.25 mm, triangular turbinate, cap thickened, apex glabrous; stigma-styles 2–3 mm; stigmas sparingly branched. **Seed** 2.7–3.0 mm. Flowers cleistogamous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Perhaps closest to *Festuca coxii* (Petrie) Hack. from which it differs by its taller, erect growth habit, flabellate rather than elongate intravaginal branching; awns 1.5–2.5 mm and much less in length than lemma, rather than 6–13 mm and much greater in length than lemma; anthers 0.6–0.8 mm rather than 3.75–4.25 mm long, and cleistogamous rather than chasmogamous (open) flowering habit.



Macquarie Island. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 28/01/2016, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Macquarie Island. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 28/01/2016, Licence: CC BY-NC-SA.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In the New Zealand Botanical region known only from Macquarie Island. Also indigenous to Falkland, South Georgia, the Kerguelen Islands, and Tierra del Fuego.

HABITAT

Coastal to upland (20–400 m a.s.l.). In grassland and amongst rocks, sometimes on cliff faces.

THREATS

This is a Macquarie Island endemic and occurs in the New Zealand Botanical Region but it is not encompassed by the New Zealand threat classification process as Macquarie is under the management of Australia.

Cats, rats, mice and rabbits introduced by sealers in the early 1800s posed a significant threat to species endemic to Macquarie Island and when cats were initially eradicated nearly a century later there was an explosion in rabbit numbers. Further efforts were made to remove rodents by the Australian Government and in 2014 Macquarie was declared pest free.

GENUS

Festuca

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Festuca contracta Kirk

SYNONYMS

Festuca erecta dUrv.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December-January

FRUITING

January-March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Florets are dispersed by wind, water and attachment (Thorsen et al. 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown in cultivation in New Zealand.

ETYMOLOGY

festuca: From the Latin *festuca* 'stem' or 'blade of grass'

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

FESCON

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Evaluated

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

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

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/festuca-contracta/>

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