

Festuca matthewsii subsp. matthewsii

COMMON NAMES

Matthews's fescue, blue fescue

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

FLOWER COLOURS

Violet/Purple, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Smooth soft to stiff green or glaucous tufted or occasionally shortly stoloniferous tussock with long wide-angled inflorescences of evidently awned florets held high above hexagonal leaf-blades from swollen collars.

Branching intravaginal. **Leaf-sheath** 30–110 mm, glabrous, keeled centrally, ridged elsewhere, much wider than leaf-blade, stramineous, margins becoming membranous; apical auricles 0.6–1.5 mm, rounded, shortly ciliate. **Ligule** as for auricles. **Collar** conspicuously thickened.

Leaf-blade 100–300 × 0.5–0.8 mm, mostly hexagonal, ribbed, undersides glabrous except for scabrid tip rarely minutely scabrid elsewhere, upper surface and margins abundantly covered in short, white hairs. **Culm** 0.25–1.0 m, usually » leaves, nodes black, lowermost often geniculate, internodes smooth, often slightly scabrid below inflorescence node.

Panicle rather open, 70–200 mm, with 5–10 nodes, of 15–50 spikelets, branches pulvinata, flexible and widely divergent sometimes contracted, basal branches 20–100 mm solitary or occasionally binate, with 3–5 spikelets, naked below, branches becoming progressively shorter and uppermost 3–4 spikelets solitary on short pedicels; rachis, branches and pedicels prickly-toothed to sparsely so becoming smooth or almost so.

Spikelets 9–20 × 3–5 mm wide, stramineous or sometimes bronze or slightly purpled, of 4–8 florets. **Glumes** unequal, keeled, centrally green to stramineous occasionally with purpled veins, triangular acute to obtuse, apex ciliate; lower 3–6 mm, 1-nerved, upper 3.5–8.0 mm, 3–5-nerved.

Lemma 5–9 mm, lobes 0 or very small, rounded on back becoming keeled above, prickly-teeth below on outer nerve and on margin, and above near awn; awn 1–4 mm. **Palea** 4.5–9.0 mm, frequently < lemma, long acute, deeply bifid, keels prickly-toothed to base or almost so, interkeel hairs mostly in upper ⅓, margins of flanks ciliate above sometimes to base.

Callus 0.2–0.4 mm, centrally glabrous very shortly bearded laterally; articulation oblique to ± flat. **Rachilla** 1.0–1.6 mm, short stiff hairy.

Lodicules 0.6–1.5 mm, ≥ ovary, often lobed, frequently hair-tipped.

Anthers 2–4 mm, yellow or yellow-purpled. **Ovary** 0.6–1.0 mm, hispid hairs at apex; stigma-styles 1.5–2.5 mm. **Seed** 3–4 mm.



Clinton River, Fiordland. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 16/11/2019, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Spikelets, Clinton River, Fiordland. Photographer: Jane Gosden, Date taken: 16/11/2019, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (east and west of Main Divide from Waiau River, Canterbury, to Fiordland, occasional in Marlborough).

HABITAT

Montane to alpine in tussock grassland.

GENUS

Festuca

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Festuca matthewsii (Hack.) Cheeseman subsp. *matthewsii*

SYNONYMS

Festuca ovina subsp. *matthewsii* Hack.; *Festuca ovina* var. *matthewsii* (Hack.) Cheeseman; *Festuca petriei* Howarth;
Festuca petriei f. *petriei*

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

November–March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. An attractive grass tolerant of most conditions but dislikes humidity.

CULTIVATION

Occasionally available from specialist native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

festuca: From the Latin *festuca* ‘stem’ or ‘blade of grass’

matthewsii: After Mathews

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to the grasses of New Zealand

NVS CODE

FESMSM

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient | Qualifiers: TL 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

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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