Isolepis caligenis

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Bright green, rhizomatous, leafy, tufted plants. **Tufts** usually distant. **Rhizome** c. 0.5 mm diameter. **Culms** 10–100 × c. 0.5 mm, stiff. **Leaves** 2–5, usually 1 at least > culm, c. 0.5 mm wide, often curved, concave-convex, plano-convex; lowermost leaves reduced to brown fibrillose sheaths. **Inflorescence** of 1–(2) spikelets; subtending bract much > spikelet; up to 30 mm, long. **Spikelets** 2–5 × 1–4 mm, ovate-elliptical to suborbicular, pale green to pale brown. **Glumes** numerous, 1.5–2.5 mm long, white and membranous, acute, occasionally with a red-brown patch on either side, or with minute dots towards apex, keel green, usually excurrent; 2 lowermost glumes frequently larger than rest, to 3.5 mm long, the lower with much extended keel. **Hypogynous bristles** 0. **Stamens** 1–3. **Style-branches** 2–3. **Nut** c. 1 mm long, slightly < 1 mm wide, suborbicular, unequally biconvex, compressed with edges flattened, apiculate, surface pearly grey, finely reticulate, appearing smooth.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily recognised by bright green, stiffly erect, leafy tufts; culms mostly > 20 mm tall; by the conspicuous, large, whitish spikelets (usually > 3 mm wide); and pearl-grey, compressed nut. Most similar to *Isolepis basilaris* Hook.f. which differs by the usually shorter culms; spikelets < 2 mm wide; and by the dorsally rounded, dark brown to almost black nut.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island, South Islands, from the Kaimanawa Range south to at least Otago.

HABITAT
Mostly montane (700–1400 m a.s.l.). In damp ground within forest, and on the margins of streams and lakes. Usually in shaded sites.

GENUS
Isolepis

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Isolepis caligenis (V.J.Cook) Soják

SYNONYMS
Scirpus caligenis var. tristigmatosa V.J.Cook, Scirpus caligenis V.J.Cook

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

Herbarium specimen: AK 289205. Photographed with permission of Auckland Institute and Museum. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 30/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

Herbarium specimen: AK 289205. Photographed with permission of Auckland Institute and Museum. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 30/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–December

FRUITING
December–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed, and from rooted pieces. Prefers a cool, shady, permanently damp site. Best grown in a pot. Dislikes humid climates.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
isolepis: From the Greek isos (equal) and lepis (scale)

NVS CODE
ISOCAL

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
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
Johnson AT, Smith HA. 1986. Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd, Buckenhill, UK.
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/isolepis-caligenis/

PDF DATE
08 June 2026