Lachnagrostis ammobia

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Mounding to trailing, somewhat lax glaucous to reddish-green, perennial, tufted grass forming patches up to 1 m diameter and 0.35 m tall; leaves markedly involute, panicles rather lax, disarticulating readily. Branching extravaginal. New shoots with 1-2 blunt-tipped sheaths at base and with the lowest leaf-blade often much reduced. **Leaf-sheath** submembranous, distinctly ribbed, smooth, rarely scabrid above. **Ligule** 1.5–4.5 mm, tapering above to an acute apex or denticulate, undersides scabrid. **Leaf-blade** 60–160 × 0.4–0.8 mm, involute, to 1.2 mm wide if flat, undersides smooth to scabrid (particularly near and at apex), upper surface finely scabrid; margins fine scabrid, apex fine subacute to obtuse. **Culm** 100–150 mm long, slender, usually included within uppermost leaf-sheath, internodes glabrous. **Panicle** 70–160 × 15–150 mm; branches few, these long, filiform, more or less closely and finely scabrid, each tipped by a single spikelet. **Spikelets** 4.5–7.0 mm, light green to purple-green. **Glumes** more or less equal, narrowly elliptic-lanceolate, scabrid above and on mid-nerve and hyaline margins or sometimes sparsely scabrid throughout. **Lemma** 2.8–3.7 mm long, more or less ½ length of glumes, 5-nerved, densely covered throughout by long silky hairs, oblong, truncate, lateral nerves minutely excurrent, rarely lemma less hairy near apex and scabrid nerves clearly visible; awn 4.0–6.0 mm, very fine, straight, or more or less curved, more or less mid-dorsal. **Palea** ≣ –¾ length of lemma, keels 0.1 mm part, apex bi**Callus** hairs dense, 1.5–2.0 mm, to ≣ length of lemma. **Rachilla** prolongation 0.5–0.8 mm long, tipped by a dense tuft of hairs 1–2 mm long. **Lodicules** 0.9–1.2 mm long, linear. **Anthers** 0.9–1.3 mm long. **Seed** c. 2.0 × 0.7(–1.0) mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily recognised by the long trailing, glaucous-green to reddish green, narrow, usually involute leaves. This species is a sand binder. *Lachnagrostis ammobia* is perhaps closest to *L. elata* Edgar from which it is readily separated by its restriction to coastal sand dune habitats, and by the densely hairy rather than sparsely hairy or glabrous lemma. *Lachnagrostis elata* favours wetland habitats in tall forest, swamps and stream sides or seepares in tussock country. It is, as the specific epithet implies a very tall grass reaching heights of over 1 m. It never forms mounds but tends to straggly up and over surrounding vegetation. Another *Lachnagrostis*, *L. billardierei*, also occurs in sand habitats, but is infrequently recorded from the distributional range of *L. ammobia*. The leaf blade of *L. billardierei* is flat, the awn is geniculate, and the inflorescence is erect. *L. littoralis* subsp. *salaria* also occurs within the range of *L. ammobia*, but this species occurs in estaurine salt marshes, has smaller spikelets (to 4 mm), less hairy and smaller lemma. The inflorescence is also erect rather than trailing and is often contracted at first. *L. filiformis* also occurs in similar habitats, but the lemma of this species is glabrous, and the awn is distinctly bent.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (Westland (Jacksons Bay), Fiordland (Milford Sound), and southern coast from Long Beach (Dunedin), Catlins to Bluff), Stewart Island/Rakiura (Masons Bay, and probably elsewhere in suitable habitat).

HABITAT
Coastal. Found in mobile and semi-stable sand dunes. Often in swales or near stream margins. On occasionally it may form small mounds of sand within ablation zones.

THREATS
A local endemic which is declining throughout most of its range. Control of marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) on Stewart Island/Rakiura appears to have arrested the decline there.

GENUS
Lachnagrostis

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Lachnagrostis ammobia Edgar

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–March

FRUITING
December–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed and rooted pieces. An excellent sand binder.

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available

ETYMOLOGY
lachnagrostis: From “lachne” (wool) referring to the distinctive callus hairs of this genus and “agrostis” by which Trinius (1820) actually meant “a grass” (not an Agrostis). So the generic name means “a hairy (woolly) grass” not “a hairy (woolly) Agrostis” as is often incorrectly stated (see Gardner 2014).

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the grasses of New Zealand

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 98

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: CI, DPR, DPS, DPT, NR, PF, RR Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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.
Gardner RO. 2014. Notes on the wind grass *Lachnagrostis filiformis* (Poaceae). *Auckland Botanical Society Journal 69(2)*: 168–170.
Trinius CB. 1820. *Fundamenta Agrostographiae*. J.G.Huebner, Vienna.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April June 2005. Description modified from Edgar & Connor (2000).
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lachnagrostis-ammobia/

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25 August 2026