

Poa acicularifolia subsp. ophitalis

COMMON NAMES

ultramafic cushion poa

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Small, tufted blue-green perennial with tufts usually aggregated or with rhizomes interconnecting to form loose mats. Plants 100–200 mm at flowering with culms far overtopping leaves, arising from a woody, much-branched rhizome, with wiry, very long-creeping roots at nodes and numerous fine rootlets; branching intravaginal; leaf-blades disarticulating at ligule. **Leaf-sheath** light cream to later greyish brown, much wider than leaf-blade, glabrous, membranous, sparsely ribbed; margins very wide hyaline. **Ligule** 1–5 mm, apically glabrous, tapered, entire, abaxially scabrid near base or smooth, occasionally extending as a rim-like membranous contra-ligule. **Leaf-blade** 5–25 × c. 0.5 mm, involute, erect, firm, rigid, glabrous; margins sparsely prickly-toothed, slightly narrowed to firm abruptly shortly curved, sometimes pungent tip. **Culm** 30–150 mm, with 1–2 small cauline leaves, internodes glabrous. **Panicle** 15–35 mm, lax; rachis glabrous, branches capillary, smooth or very finely scabrid, with 1–2 spikelets at branchlet tips. **Spikelets** 4–8 mm, 2–5-flowered, light grey-green. **Glumes** subequal, 2.0–3.5 mm, 3-nerved, elliptic-ovate, midnerve scabrid near subobtusate tip, margins often finely scabrid. **Lemna** 3–4 mm, 5-nerved, oblong-elliptic, obtuse, short-pubescent throughout lower $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ but central internerves sometimes glabrous, scabrid above on midnerve and occasionally towards tip; margins scabrid above. **Palea** 2.5–3.5 mm, keels ciliate-scabrid, interkeel minutely hairy on lower $\frac{1}{2}$. **Callus** ringed by short soft hairs. **Rachilla** 0.5–1 mm, usually ciliate; prolongation twice as long. **Lodicules** 0.5 mm. **Anthers** 1.8–3 mm. **Seeds** c. 1.5–2 × 0.5 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Most likely to be confused with *Poa colensoi* Hook.f., which is a highly variable species. The *P. colensoi* form present on ultramafic substrates differs from *P. acicularifolia* subsp. *ophitalis* by the scabrid rather than smooth upper leaf-blades, and short-hairy rather than almost glabrous or shortly scabrid lemmas. *Poa acicularifolia* Buchanan subsp. *acicularifolia* is confined to calcareous substrates and differs by its tightly compact, mat-forming growth, and shorter, rigid, cartilaginous, falcate leaves.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (eastern Nelson and western Marlborough).

HABITAT

Subalpine. An ultramafic endemic confined to ultramafic soil and scree.



Red Hills, Richmond Ranges. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 08/01/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Red Hills, Richmond Ranges. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 08/01/2023, Licence: CC BY-NC.

THREATS

An ultramafic endemic, which is naturally restricted to small areas of suitable habitat within the subalpine zone of this rock type. There are currently no known threats to this grass.

GENUS

Poa

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Poa acicularifolia subsp. *ophitalis* Edgar

SYNONYMS

None (first described in 1986)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

December–March

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a small pot in an alpine house. Resents humidity and does best in free draining, base-rich soils.

WHERE TO BUY

Not Commercially Available

ETYMOLOGY

poa: Meadow grass

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

POAASO

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Manaaki Whenua Press, Christchurch, NZ. 650 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (June 2005). Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000). 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/poa-acicularifolia-subsp-ophitalis/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026