Poa foliosa

COMMON NAMES
muttonbird poa

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, SO
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Dioecious, robust, green tussocks up to 1.5 m tall, arising from short, narrow, woody stolons, with shoots covered at base by abundant fibrous remnants of sheaths. **Branching** extravaginal; leaf-blades persistent. **Leaf-sheath** light brown, coriaceous, glabrous, closely striate, keel prominent above. **Ligule** 1–3 mm, apically glabrous, entire, rounded, abaxially finely scabrid. **Leaf-blade** 150–500 × 1–6 mm, coriaceous, tough, flat, abaxially smooth with prominent midrib and many lateral ribs, adaxially short-scabrid, bearing two prominent ridges along centre; margins thickened, smooth, tip entire, smooth, semi-pungent. **Culm** 200–600 mm, internodes glabrous. **Panicle** 100–250 mm, dense, with all branches, except the longer ones, bearing spikelets almost to base; rachis and branches mostly smooth. **Spikelets** 5.5–9.0 mm, 3–6-flowered, light greenish brown. **Glumes** subequal, long-acuminate, membranous, except for thickened nerves, smooth, but with a few prickle-teeth on nerves above and occasionally on margins; lower 3–6 mm, 1–3-nerved, narrow-lanceolate, upper 4.0–6.5 mm, 3-nerved, narrow elliptic-lanceolate. **Lemma** 5–7 mm, 5-nerved, acute or with midnerve very shortly excurrent, scabrid except near base, midnerve ciliate to more than halfway, outer lateral nerves, internerves, and margins with minute hairs in lower ⅓. **Palea** 3.5–4.5 mm, keel rather densely ciliate-scabrid, interkeel and flanks with sparse minute hairs and prickle-teeth. **Callus** with large tuft of crinkled hairs just below midnerve of lemma. **Rachilla** c. 0.5 mm, glabrous. **Lodicules** 0.4–0.7 mm, rarely hair-tipped. **Dioecious**: male with anthers 2.0–3.3 mm, gynoecium 0; female with pollen-sterile anthers c. 0.6–1.0 mm, often on long filaments; stigma-styles c. 2 mm. **Seed** 2 mm; rarely perfect.

Poa foliosa. Photographer: Alan Stewart, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Enderby Island. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Similar to *Poa tennantiana* Petrie which is a superficially similar southern New Zealand robust grass of coastal areas, especially near sea bird nesting grounds. *Poa tennantiana* differs from *P. foliosa* by its monoecious rather than dioecious habit, yellow-green rather than green leaves, by the lower leaf-sheaths scabrid between the nerves, rather than smooth, and by the glabrous rather than hairy (hairs crinkly in a prominent tuft) callus.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: Stewart Island/Rakiura (north-eastern Titi Islands), Solander Island, Antipodes Islands, Auckland Islands, Campbell Island, and Macquarie Island (Australian Territory but part of the New Zealand Botanical region).

HABITAT
Coastal, usually near sea bird nesting grounds, often on steep slopes, sometimes in turf near shore.

THREATS
Not Threatened. Listed because it is a narrow range, offshore island endemic. It is abundant in its known locations with no obvious threats.

GENUS
Poa

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Poa foliosa (Hook.f.) Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
Festuca foliosa Hook.f.; Poa foliosa (Hook.f.) Hook.f. var. foliosa; Festuca foliosa var. â Hook.f.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–December

FRUITING
November–April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Dislikes humidity and will not flower or thrive in warm climates.

ETYMOLOGY
poa: Meadow grass
foliosa: Leafy

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

NVS CODE
POAFOL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 28

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, SO
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, SO
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
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-foliosa/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026