

Poa tennantiana

COMMON NAMES

muttonbird poa

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Yellow-green, rather stout, stiff-leaved, perennial tussock-forming grass up to 1 m tall, arising from a strong rhizomatous base covered by abundant fibrous remnants of leaf-sheaths; branching intravaginal; leaf-blades persistent. **Leaf-sheath** submembranous, striate, densely, retrorsely, minutely pubescent-scabrid between ribs in basal leaves, glabrous in cauline leaves, very light brown, later becoming darker and shredding into fibres. **Ligule** 6–16 mm, apically glabrous, entire, narrowed to a long fine point, abaxially short-pubescent. **Leaf-blade** 160–380 x 4.5–9.0 mm, flat, finely striate, abaxially smooth, adaxially minutely papillose, very rarely minutely ciliate-scabrid on ribs; margins ciliate-fimbriate for a short distance above ligule, otherwise glabrous, gradually narrowed to straight-sided acute tip. **Culm** 150–330 mm, internodes glabrous. **Panicle** 90–160 mm, broad, dense but much-branched, upper branches almost completely hidden by numerous, rather small spikelets, lower branches naked towards base; rachis smooth, branches and pedicels ± scabrid to occasionally smooth. **Spikelets** 3.5–4.5 mm, 2–3-flowered, light brown. **Glumes** subequal, ovate-lanceolate, acute, glabrous; lower 2.0–2.5 mm, 1-nerved, upper 2.5–3.0 mm, 3-nerved; midnerve near tip and margins with sparse prickles. **Lemma** 3.0–3.5 mm, 5-nerved, ovate-elliptic, minutely pubescent-scabrid, nerves longer ciliate on lower $\frac{1}{3}$, acute, or midnerve very shortly excurrent. **Palea** 2.5–3.0 mm, keels scabrid in upper $\frac{1}{2}$, interkeel smooth or with a few prickles. **Callus** glabrous. **Rachilla** c. 0.5 mm, glabrous; prolongation twice as long. **Lodicules** 0.5–0.8 mm. **Anthers** 1.0–1.5 mm. **Seed** 1.5 x 0.5 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Similar to *Poa foliosa* (Hook.f.) Hook.f. 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: South (Otago (Taieri River Mouth), Stewart, Snares and Auckland Islands. It has not been seen on the Auckland Islands recently.

HABITAT

Coastal usually in or near sea bird nesting grounds, on forest margins, clearings, in low scrub, on cliff faces and damp banks.

THREATS

Not threatened. Listed because it is a narrow range endemic of mainly offshore island. It is abundant in most of its known locations with no obvious threats.

GENUS

Poa

FAMILY

Poaceae



AUTHORITY

Poa tennantiana Petrie

SYNONYMS

Poa foliosa var. *tennantiana* (Petrie) Cheeseman

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.

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY

poa: Meadow grass

tennantiana: After Tennant, teacher and member of the 1907 expedition to the subantarctic islands

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

POATEN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 56$

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient 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. 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-tennantiana/>

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