

Scirpus polystachyus

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Semi-aquatic to terrestrial summer green sedge forming robust leafy clumps up to 1.8 m tall. **Stems** more or less triquetrous, basally very leafy, with 3–5–(8) evenly spaced, cauline leaves. **Leaves** numerous, much < stems, 0.4–0.8 m × 5–8 mm, basally channelled but becoming flattened in upper half, strongly keeled, margins and keel finely scabrid; sheaths light reddish-brown, lustrous. **Inflorescence** a terminal compound, irregular, fan-shaped, umbel bearing many unequal erect rays; secondary rays slender, more or less drooping at maturity; leaf-like bracts c. 3, > inflorescence, upper bracts dark brown, strongly nerved. **Spikelets** more or less 4 mm long, ovate, in clusters of 2–5 at tips of rays. **Glumes** more or less 1.5 mm long, light brown to live, membranous, much darker towards apex, midrib thickened, not excurrent. **Hypogynous bristles** many, filiform, much > nut, folded, twisted or spiralled, very conspicuous at maturity. **Stamens** 3. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** more or less 0.7 mm long, more or less trigonous but dorsal angle not well marked, cream.

SIMILAR TAXA

None. However, in its vegetative state it can be confused with *Bolboschoenus* spp. which differ by their bulbous root stock, distinctly triquetrous stems, and by the leaves evenly spaced from the stem base to the inflorescence. Flowering material is very different as *Scirpus polystachyus* has a distinctive, densely and many flowered, fan-shaped umbel, those of *Bolboschoenus* either lack rays or have up to 3 short rays bearing up to 4 spikelets, subtending by a sessile mass of 3–4 spikelets.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In New Zealand known only on the West Coast of the South Island, mainly in wetland south of Hokitika to about Okarito. Its range is still expanding. Common in Australia.

HABITAT

Coastal to low lying fertile to moderately acidic open wetlands, lake, pond and slow flowing stream margins. Usually in well lighted places, often with its basal stems and rhizomes immersed in water.



Herbarium specimen AK 282672. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Herbarium specimen AK 282672, detail. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC

THREATS

Not apparent threats but very localised in its distribution. Because the first gatherings were made from near plantation forestry this species has been regarded as a weed introduced from Australia (Healy & Edgar 1980). The alternative, that it naturally arrived here by wind or avian dispersal was not considered at the time. This species has seeds suited to bird dispersal and it is not associated with plantation forestry in Australia. Its distribution in New Zealand overlaps with that of grey teal which feed in areas it frequents and are known to move between countries, so are a suitable seed vector. Therefore de Lange et al. (2009) treated it as a successful trans-Tasman colonist that while still uncommon is now actively spreading.

GENUS

Scirpus

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Scirpus polystachyus F.Muell.

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September–February

FRUITING

December–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Grows easily from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Has some potential as a pond ornamental. Requires full sun to flourish

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 60

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: DP, SO

2012 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO

2009 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO

2004 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange PJ, Norton DA, Courtney SP, Heenan PB, Barkla JW, Cameron EK, Hitchmough RA, Townsend AJ. 2009. Threatened and uncommon plants of New Zealand (2008 revision). *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 47(1): 61–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00288250909509794>.
Healy AJ, Edgar E. 1980. Flora of New Zealand, Volume III. Adventive Cyperaceous, Petalous and Spathaceous Monocotyledons. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 220 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (30 August 2005). Description adapted from Healy & Edgar (1980) supplemented with details obtained from fresh plants and herbarium material by P.J. de Lange. 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](#).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/scirpus-polystachyus/>

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