Stenostachys laevis

COMMON NAMES
grassland wheatgrass

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

Ex. Lake Tennyson. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Licence: All rights reserved.

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Perennial grass, forming loose patches, these rooting and shooting freely at nodes. **Inflorescences** narrow, nodding, on long slender stems (culms). **Leaf-sheath** 5–10 cm, either covered in curved hairs or hairless. **Ligule** 0.5–1 mm, prominent, tips lacerated. **Leaf-blade** 15–25 cm × 1.5–2 mm, flat (often inrolled in coastal plants), thin, with a prominent midrib, hairless or finely hairy. **Culms** 50–75 cm, nodes inconspicuous, internodes hairless, slender. **Inflorescence** narrow, slender, 8–15 cm, of 10–25 spikelets > internodes. **Spikelets** 8–12 mm, of 1–2 florets. **Glumes** 2, awn-like, 2–6 mm, equal, 1-nerved. **Lemma** 6.5–8 mm, smooth except for prickle-teeth towards bifid tip, apex either spine-tipped (mucronate) or extended as a short, toothed, awn 0.5–1 mm. **Anthers** 1.6–2.6 mm. **Seed** 4 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Distinguished from *S. deceptorix* Connor and *S. gracilis* (Hook.f.) Connor by the lemma (lower set of bracts which enclose the flower, grass equivalent of petals) apex possessing between the lateral teeth either a spine-tip (mucronate) or short awned. *Stenostachys* grasses are perhaps most similar to *Anthosachne* spp. because the glumes are either absent or reduced and awn-like, and by the spikelets which are positioned edgewise along the inflorescence stem (rachis) rather than side-on as in *Anthosachne*. Inrolled leaves of coastal plants become flat in cultivation.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island; only known from Reporoa Bog (North West Ruahine Range). South Island; throughout except Nelson, and Westland. Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT
Small grass of tussock grasslands, grey scrub, shaded cliff faces, and lake sides. Often in flushes. Occasionally coastal. From sea level to 1300 m a.s.l.

THREATS
Stenostachys laevis faces no apparent threats but it is certainly uncommon, and easily overlooked. Because of this, there are few recent >1980 records.

GENUS
Stenostachys

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Stenostachys laevis (Petrie) Connor

SYNONYMS
Asprella laevis Petrie, Cockaynea laevis (Petrie) Zotov, Hystrix laevis (Petrie) Allan, Elymus laevis (Petrie) Á.Löve et Connor

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
January–March

FRUITING
March–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Very easy from rooted pieces, divisions of whole plants and from fresh seed. Grows best in light shade.

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

NVS CODE
STELAE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 28

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CI, DPR, DPS, DPT, NStr, RR, Sp, TL 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.

ATTRIBUTION
Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

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MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/stenostachys-laevis/

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