

Carex albula

COMMON NAMES

white sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stiffly erect to drooping, buff-coloured to almost bleached white, green or red, densely caespitose sedge, 250–350 mm tall. **Culms** 50–200 × 0.5 mm smooth, often with a deep groove; basal sheaths dark brown to purple-red. **Leaves** numerous, much > culms, 0.8–0.9–(1) mm wide, plano-convex, rigid, grooved, margins scabrid. **Spikes** 3–6–(8); terminal spike male; remaining spikes female, 5–20 × 3–5 mm, distant, upper spikes sessile to sub-sessile, lower spikes narrower, flattened, with scabrid peduncles. **Glumes** (excluding awn) slightly < utricle length, broadly ovate, acute, pale cream with a few to many scattered fine brown striae, chartaceous, nerves beside midrib usually indistinct, awn long and narrow, finely scabrid. **Utricles** 2.5–3 × 1.5 mm, plano-convex to subtrigonal, elliptic-ovoid, pale brown, nerved on the convex face towards margin; beak 0.5 mm, deeply bidentate with spreading crura, margins and crura scabrid. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 1.5 mm, light grey-brown, trigonal, oblong-ovoid.

SIMILAR TAXA

In the field most similar to either hard tussock *Festuca novaezealandiae* (which often has spikes visible above the leaves) or silver tussock *Poa cita* (which is usually a larger plant with typical grass flowers). Within the sedges most like *Carex comans* Bergg., *C. albula* is best distinguished from that species by the usually stiffly erect growth habit, pale foliage colour, and pale cream glumes. However some plants can also appear green or red and can only be distinguished from *C. comans* by the pale glume with small red flecks and by the obvious ven towards the margin of the outer face of the utricle. The peculiar bleached-white colour implied by the specific name is only apparent in some plants and is often imparted by the dead foliage (which is retained).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island in a narrow area from the Mackenzie Basin, Waitaki and Central Otago.

HABITAT

A species of mainly alluvial terraces, colluvial slopes and river flats. It prefers free draining soils and is often a local component of grey scrub communities. Seemingly unpalatable it often persists in paddocks alongside cattle and sheep.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, PF

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

THREATS

A local regional endemic. Though it does not seem to be particularly palatable as it is often found in some abundance within pasture otherwise heavily cropped by sheep and/or cattle, plants have been lost to spraying and cultivation. It also does not seem to tolerate competition from taller species.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex albula Allan

SYNONYMS

Carex comans var *stricta* Cheeseman



ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

October–September

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from the division of whole plants and from fresh seed. Best suited for a well drained, sunny site in dry climates. This species dislikes humidity and soon dies if kept too moist. An unusual sedge well worth cultivating.

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

NVS CODE

CARALB

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = c.60

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: Sp

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2009 | Data Deficient

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2024 | Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPR, NR, NStr, PF, RF

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-albula/>

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