

# Carex spirostris

## COMMON NAMES

coastal sedge, petrel scrub sedge

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Densely caespitose, tufted, dark green sedge of high fertility sites in shaded coastal forest, lowland forest and forested offshore islands (especially within petrel colonies). **Culms** 0.1–1.2 m × 1.5–2 mm; basal sheaths dark red-purple. **Leaves** equal to or greater than culms, 2.5–6 mm wide, double-folded, with keel and margins distinctly scabrid.

**Inflorescence** of 4–6–8 spikes; terminal spike male, often compound, with female flowers intermixed in the secondary spikes; remaining spikes female with a few male flowers at the base, equal to or slightly longer than male spikes, 15–85–(100) × 3–4 mm, uppermost spikes closet set, shortly pedunculate, lowermost spikes rather distant, drooping on slender filiform peduncles; subtending bracts leaf-like, much longer than inflorescence, almost the same width as foliage leaves. **Glumes** equal to or slightly than utricles in length, bright red-purple, rather membranous, deciduous, lanceolate, subacute to almost emarginated, midrib extended as a long scabrid awn. **Utricles** 3–4 × 1 mm, triquetrous, fusiform, conspicuously ribbed with pale veins, margins smooth, pale grey below, above bright red and narrowed (often rather abruptly) to a 1.5 mm long beak; crura scabrid; stipe 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 2 mm long, yellow, yellow-brown or rarely light brown, oblong, trigonous.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Closely allied to *Carex ophiolithica* de Lange et Heenan from which it differs by its ecology, non-bulbous culm bases, drooping culms, dense tussock-forming habit, dark red-brown to purple-brown basal sheaths, distinctly pendulous spikelets, bright red-purple glumes, red to red-brown mature utricles, and yellow, yellow-brown or rarely light brown, oblong, trigonous, smaller nut. *Carex ophiolithica* is a smaller sedge of open coastal ultramafic cliff, scree, boulder field, and low scrub with bulbous culm bases, erect culms, erect, very shortly pedunculate spikes, light green to pale brown glumes, pale brown to purple brown glumes, and a larger ovoid, trigonous, dark brown to grey brown nut.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island from Te Pahi south to the Horowhenua and Wairarapa. Most common in northern part of range, particularly along the coast and on many of the Hauraki Gulf islands.

## HABITAT

Favouring coastal to lowland forest, usually in semi-shaded sites on banks, colluvium or gently sloping sites overlying free draining, fertile soils. Also a conspicuous sedge of offshore islands in the Hauraki Gulf where it is one of the main species found under forest within petrel colonies.

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)



Motumakareta, Coromandel. Oct.

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## DETAILED TAXONOMY

### FAMILY

Cyperaceae

### AUTHORITY

Carex spinirostris Colenso

### SYNONYMS

Carex cinnamomea Cheesman.; Carex forsteri Wahl. var. cockayniana (Kük.) Kük.

### ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

### ENDEMIC GENUS

No

### ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

### ECOLOGY

### FLOWERING

August–October

### FRUITING

September–March

### 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. Does best in free draining, fertile soils in semi-shade. An attractive sedge well worth cultivating.

### OTHER INFORMATION

### WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

### ETYMOLOGY

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

### MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand](#)

### NVS CODE

CARSPI

### CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 60-66

### PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | At Risk – Regionally Relict | Qualifiers: DE, DPR, DPS, DPT, RR Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland” Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

## 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.

### ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) 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/carex-spinirostris/>

### PDF DATE

31 July 2025