Carex testacea

COMMON NAMES
speckled sedge, trip-me-up

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Densely tufted, 0.3–0.6–(0.8) m high, usually dark red to orange-red sedge. **Culms** < or > leaves, often exceedingly elongated at maturity, up to 2 m long, trailing, prostrate, < 1 mm diameter, often almost filiform, trigonous or subtrigonous, glabrous or slightly scabrid below the inflorescence; basal sheaths dark brown or red-brown, nerves distinct. **Leaves** 1.0–2.5–(3.0) mm wide, channelled, usually reddish or orange-green, sometime slight green, harshly scabrid. **Spikes** 3–5, ± approximate; terminal spike male, c. 1 mm diameter, ± = female spikes in length, on a filiform peduncle; remaining spikes female, 5–25–(30) × c. 5 mm, often with a few male flowers at the base, sessile, or the lowest more distant and shortly pedunculate. **Glumes** (excluding awn) ± = utricle, broadly ovate, thin and membranous, often deeply emarginate, occasionally entire, very light brown with darker flecks, midrib usually brown-spotted, produced to a scabrid awn of variable length. **Utricles** c. 2.5 × 1.5 mm, ± plano-convex, broadly ovoid, pale yellow-brown below, purple-brown above, nerved, more strongly so on the more convex face, shining, narrowed abruptly to the deeply bifid beak c. 0.5 mm long, margins and orifice usually finely scabrid, occasionally ± contracted below to a stipe c. 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** c. 1.5 mm long, biconvex, dark brown, almost black.

Otama Beach, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

At Otama Beach, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Carex testacea belongs to a complex of allied species which include the South Island, ultramafic endemic *C. devia* Cheesemanii, *C. raoulii* Boott, and *C. flagellifera* Colenso. From *C. devia* and *C. raoulii* it is best distinguished by its usually long trailing fruiting culms, narrow, mostly orange-red, or reddish-green, channelled leaves, and usually distant, pendent female spikes. It is morphologically closest to *C. flagellifera* (itself a species complex). From that species, at least in its typical form is differs by the usually orange-red to red-green, rather than yellow-green to dark green culms, and membranous, mostly light brown glumes bearing numerous fine, red-brown striae, rather than uniformly red brown to dark red-brown, subcoriaceous glumes. Forms of *C. testacea* from upland short-tussock grassland typically have wider leaves and shorter culms, and in some sites are difficult to distinguish from *C. wakatipu* Petrie.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North and South Islands. Uncommon in the South Island.

HABITAT
Coastal to montane. In sand dunes, coastal forest and scrub, dense forest or short tussock (*Festuca novae-zelandiae* (Hack.) Cockayne) grassland.

GENUS
Carex

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Carex testacea Sol. ex Boott

SYNONYMS
None

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Carex testacea is extremely variable and is probably better regarded as a species complex. Plants of inland forests are usually much stouter, and have longer, darker brown spikes than those collected from coastal areas.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–December

FRUITING
November–May (but may be present throughout the year)

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of established plants. Can be grown in full sun and deep shade but prefers a free draining soil. Forms with dark orange-red leaves and culms are very popular in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY
carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.
testacea: From the Latin ‘testa’ tile, referring to either the hard quality of something or its yellow-brown colour like that of terracotta.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand

NVS CODE
CARTES

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = c.52

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 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.
Northland: 2026 | Regionally Not Threatened Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Northland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Northland | Taitokerau" Ford et al. 2026 report.

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)
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-testacea/

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