

Cenchrus setaceus

COMMON NAMES

African fountain grass

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Thickly-tufted perennials to 100cm, light green at base with narrow inrolled leaves; branching intravaginal. **Sheath** rounded or slightly keeled above, subcoriaceous, margins long-ciliate. **Ligule** 0.3–0.7 mm, a membranous densely ciliate rim. **Collar hairs** to 2.5 mm. **Blade** 15–30 cm × 0.5–1.5 mm., stiff, folded or involute, long-tapering, adaxially very scabrid; margins especially with a few scattered long hairs, tip filiform, acute. **Culm** 30–45cm, erect, internodes with many finely scabrid ridges. **Panicle** 8.5–20 cm, narrow-cylindric, dense, spike-like, often tinged reddish-purple; rachis hairs short, soft. **Spikelets** 5–6mm, lanceolate, acute, pale green to purple, solitary or in clusters of 2–3 on ciliate pedicels to 3 mm; involucre of numerous plumose, fine unequal bristles, one longer but not stouter bristle to 35 mm. **Lower glume** a hyaline scale to 1 mm or 0. Upper glume 2–2.5 mm, 1-nerved, hyaline, minutely scabrid. **Lower floret** male or sterile; lemma 4.5–5 mm, 3-nerved, membranous, nerves minutely scaberulous near tip; palea = lemma, hyaline, rounded, keeled near tip, minutely scaberulous, or palea 0; anthers 2–3 mm or 0. **Upper floret** hermaphrodite; lemma 5.5–6 mm, 5-nerved, membranous, nerves scaberulous near mucronate tip; palea 4.5–5mm, hyaline, keels scarcely scaberulous near tip; lodicules 0.3–0.4 mm; anthers 2–3 mm; styles connate, stigmas free; caryopsis approx. 3 × 1.2 mm (Edgar & Connor, 2000).

HABITAT

Terrestrial.

GENUS

Cenchrus

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Cenchrus setaceus (Forssk.) Morrone

SYNONYMS

Pennisetum setaceum Chiov.

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No



Pennisetum setaceum. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.



Pennisetum setaceum. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.

YEAR NATURALISED

1982

ORIGIN

W asia - N Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. All utilize the C4 photosynthetic pathway and are +/- winter dormant. Apomictic (asexual reproduction where embryos develop without fertilization) and to a smaller degree, out-crossing. Pollination is required for apomictic seed development. Seeds of crimson fountaingrass and feathertop require several months (fall through early to mid-spring) to mature. Flower heads typically remain intact during this period. Most seeds germinate late spring through early summer. Spikelets with bristles disperse in late spring with wind, water, human activities, and by clinging to animals.

ETYMOLOGY

cenchrus: From the Greek cenchros which means millet

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

NVS CODE

CENSET

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Manaaki Whenua Press, Christchurch, NZ. 650 p.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cenchrus-setaceus/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026