

Chionochloa rubra subsp. rubra

var. rubra

COMMON NAME

red tussock

SYNONYMS

Danthonia antarctica var. delta minor Hook.f.

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Chionochloa rubra Zotov subsp. rubra var. rubra

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Volcanic Plateau southwards), South Island (Marlborough and North Canterbury (scarce)).

HABITAT

Subalpine to alpine (rarely upper montane). Often the dominant of tussock grassland, also found within shallow bogs or fringing the margins of deeper bogs and small ponds, tarns and slow flowing streams. Occasionally in canopy gaps in upper montane forest or within subalpine scrub.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).



In cultivation. Dec 2001. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Licence: CC BY.



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

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tall, slender, red tussock with crowded, erect, stiff, rush-like leaves. **Leaf-sheath** to 300 mm, dark brown, keeled, incurving, fracturing into short segments, internerves glabrous or long hairy, margin scabrid, separating and coiling, apical tuft of hairs to 3 mm. **Ligule** to 1 mm. **Leaf-blade** to 1 m long and 1.2 mm diameter, falling with part of sheath, red to red-brown, acicular rush-like, splitting longitudinally, keel hollow, undersides glabrous but infrequently with long hairs near base, prickle-teeth towards apex, upper surface with rows of short hairs at base, and prickle-teeth; margin scabrid, with long hairs below, and prickle-teeth above. **Culm** to 1.5 m, internodes glabrous, sheath glabrous. Inflorescence to 45 cm, open on pulvinate branches, glabrous except for long hairs at branch axils and short stiff hairs below spikelets, rarely becoming scabrid above. **Spikelets** of up to 9 florets. **Glumes** glabrous, acute, infrequently awned, less than or equal to adjacent lemma lobes, lower to 12 mm, 1–3–5-nerved, upper to 14 mm, 3–5–7-nerved. **Lemma** to 5 mm; hairs dense on margin, usually absent or sparse elsewhere, < sinus; lateral lobes to 6 mm including awn to 3 mm, rarely unawned; central awn to 13 mm from twisting column to 3 mm. **Palea** to 8 mm. **Callus** to 1.5 mm, hairs to 4 mm. **Rachilla** to 0.75 mm. **Lodicules** to 1 mm. **Anthers** to 3.5 mm. **Ovary** to 1 mm; stigma-styles to 4 mm. **Seeds** to 3.5 mm.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to the grasses of New Zealand](#)

SIMILAR TAXA

Chionochloa rubra subsp. *rubra* var. *inermis* Connor has greenish leaves with papillate upper surfaces and smooth margins and is an allopatric variant endemic to Mt Taranaki or Mt Egmont. Distinguished from the other subspecies of *C. rubra* by the upper leaf surface, which just above the ligule bears short hairs or is completely glabrous and by the abundant prickle-teeth along the leaf margin.

FLOWERING

October–December

FRUITING

November–May

LIFE CYCLE

Florets are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and the division of whole plants. However, can be slow growing and dislikes warm, humid climates and drought. Though once established it can take plenty of abuse. The reddish leaves are especially attractive.

ETYMOLOGY

chionochloa: Snow grass

rubra: Red

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (June 2005). Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/chionochloa-rubra-subsp-rubra-var-rubra/>