



Puccinellia chathamica

Common Name(s):

Chatham Islands salt grass

Current Threat Status (2012):

At Risk - Naturally Uncommon

Distribution:

Endemic. Confined to the Auckland, Campbell and Chatham Islands. On the Chatham Islands it occurs on Chatham, Pitt, South-East and Rabbit Island.

Habitat:

Coastal cliffs, clay faces, rocky shores and islets. Usually it is found growing within the zone of heavy salt influence very near the shore, frequently in seepages and mostly out of stock reach.

Features*:

Erect, densely tufted, glaucous to dark green, pliant but rigidly firm grass 60-500 mm tall. Upper most leaves over topping culms; branching intravaginal. Leaf-sheath light greenish brown, dark brown or purple glabrous, firmly membranous, striate. Ligule 0.6-3 mm, obtuse or truncate, glabrous, entire. Leaf blade 50-300 x 5-10 mm, folded, rarely flat, abaxially glabrous, adaxially finely ribbed, ribs finely scabrid, apex acute, smooth, rarely subobtuse and apiculate. Culm usually hidden by sheaths, internodes glabrous. Panicle usually overtopped by leaves, 20-130 x 6-20 mm, linear-lanceolate, erect, very contracted, dense; branches stiff, smooth, subacute-angled. Spikelets 3-9 mm, 2-5-flowered, glaucous or brown-green. Glumes unequal, narrow lanceolate to elliptic-oblong, subacute; lower 1.5-4.5 mm, 1-3-nerved, elliptic-oblong, usually with a few hairs at base and on nerves near base to about midway. Lemma apex minutely ciliate-scabrid, obtuse with slightly excurrent midnerve, rarely entire; lemma usually 5-nerved (rarely 7-nerved). Palea less than or equal to lemma, keels scabrid in upper 1/3 rarely slightly ciliate below, reaching only to apex. Rhacilla 0.8-1.8 mm. Anthers 0.6-1.5 mm, purple. Seed 1.5-2.6 x 0.4-0.8 mm, brown or grey-brown.

Flowering:

September - January

Fruiting:

December - May

Threats:

Sheep, cattle and goats pose the greatest threats to those populations on the two main, and farmed islands of the Chatham Island group, Chatham and Pitt. However, this grass is secure on many of the outer offshore islands of that archipelago, including the remote Forty-fours. Some of the main Chatham Island populations are vulnerable to coastal erosion. On the Auckland Islands its exact status is unknown but recent visits suggest that it is locally common in suitable habitats.

*Attribution:

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000).

References and further reading:

Edgar, E.; Connor, H.E. 2000: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Christchurch, Manaaki Whenua Press. 650 pp.

For more information, visit:

http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=38



Caption: *Puccinellia walkeri* subsp. *chathamica* plants in *Disphyma* turf overlying basalt talus

Photographer: Peter de Lange



Caption: *Puccinellia walkeri* subsp. *chathamica* plant showing growth habit

Photographer: Peter de Lange