

Digitaria setigera

COMMON NAME

Pacific crab grass

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Digitaria setigera Roem. et Schult.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

NVS CODE

DIGSET

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: OL, SO

2009 | Not Evaluated

2004 | Not Evaluated

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Northern Kermadec Islands where locally common on The Meyers, Herald Islets, Chanters and Napier. Recorded from Raoul Island but not confirmed from there recently. Collected once sometime between 1838 and 1840 (possibly as a genuinely naturalised occurrence) from the Bay of Islands, North Island, New Zealand. Widespread through tropical Asia, Pacific to French Polynesia and North Australia.

HABITAT

Seemingly restricted to makatea and low shrubland overlying basalt tuff and rock on the smaller islands of the northern Kermadec group. Often found around the nests of Kermadec petrel (*Pterodroma neglecta*) and Tasman booby (*Sula dactylatra tasmani*). *Digitaria setigera* has also been reported from Raoul Island but there it has been much confused with the superficially similar *D. ciliaris* (common on Raoul as an introduced species) and it is not clear if it still present on that island.



Digitaria setigera herbarium specimen collected from North Chanter, The Chanters, Herald Islets, Kermadec Islands (P.J. de Lange K1265, AK 356072). Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Date taken: 01/08/2011, Licence: CC BY-ND.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Annual, weakly caespitose to loosely matted grass forming tufts up to 1 m tall (usually much less). **Stem** rooting at lower nodes. **Leaf-sheath** folded, ribbed, light green to dark green, sometimes glaucescent or darkly maroon pigmented, bearing long, fine, spreading, tubercle-based hairs. **Ligule** 1.0–2.5 mm, membranous, glabrous, truncate, erose. **Leaf-blade** 35–100 × 2–7 mm, light green, dark green, often glaucescent, soft, linear tapering to long, finely pointed tip, surfaces finely hairy, ribs and margins scabrid. **Culm** 0.1–0.45(–1.0) m, ascending-erect or floppy, internodes glabrous. **Raceme** 3–5, 35–100 mm, slender, compressed, digitate or spreading; rachis 3-angled, winged, 0.3–0.8 mm wide, scabrid on angles, short-hairy at base. **Spikelets** 2.5–3.5 mm, paired, lanceolate, long-acute, laterally with fine acute-tipped hairs. **Lower glume** 0, or reduced to a minute rim or scale c.0.1 mm, upper 0.6–1.5 mm, c. $\frac{1}{4}$ –($\frac{1}{3}$) length of spikelet, 0–3-nerved, deltoid, obtuse to subacute, glabrous, or with long hairs on margins overtopping glume. **Lower floret**; lemma = spikelet, 5–7-nerved, nerves inaequidistant, glabrous, outer internerves with long hairs. **Upper floret**; lemma ≈ spikelet, glabrous, acuminate, yellowish or light brown (amber) at maturity; palea ≈ lemma, similar in texture and shape; anthers 1.0–1.3 mm; stigmas brown; caryopsis c.1.5 mm, oblong.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

FLOWERING

On the Kermadec Islands flowering may occur throughout the year.

FLOWER COLOURS

Brown, Purple

FRUITING

On the Kermadec Islands fruiting may occur throughout the year.

LIFE CYCLE

Annual. Seeds dispersed by sea birds, gravity and water.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Not known to be cultivated in New Zealand.

THREATS

Digitaria setigera is locally common on the outer islands of the Northern Kermadec Islands group. Beyond the small area of occupancy there are no active threats known from this species, though it may have been lost from Raoul Island. *Digitaria setigera* is a common, and at times weedy species of the wider Pacific which is close to its world southern limit on the Kermadec Islands.

BIOSTATUS

Digitaria setigera was initially treated as indigenous to the Kermadec Islands by Cheeseman (1888, 1906, 1925) and Oliver (1910). It was Sykes (1977, p. 166–167) as *D. pruriens* (Trin.) Büse who first treated this grass as naturalised, though his comments about it being suited to long distance avian dispersal, its close association on the Kermadec Islands with sea bird nesting sites and other general comments about its indigenous status in the 'Tropical Pacific' implies that he may also have considered it indigenous there. Velkamp (1973), who synonymised *D. pruriens* with *D. setigera*, included the Kermadec Islands in this species' natural distribution without further comment. Despite this, Edgar & Shand (1987), Edgar & Connor (2000, 2010) treated *Digitaria setigera* as naturalised to the Kermadec Islands though without providing any justification for their decision (it is assumed they took advice from W.R. Sykes). Despite this view, Pacific flora and grass treatments and view points of botanists studying that region, notably including Sykes himself when questioned in 2013, regard this grass as indigenous to tropical Asia, Malesia, the Pacific Islands and northern Australia, and significantly with respect to the Kermadec Islands, also the nearby Norfolk Island group, so its presence on the Northern Kermadec Island group is not incompatible with it being indigenous there (Green 1994, Whistler 1995; Edgar & Connor 2010; R. O. Gardner, W.R. Sykes & W.A. Whistler *pers. comm.* December 2013). For this reason de Lange et al. (2018) accept *Digitaria setigera* as indigenous to the Kermadec Islands. The sole New Zealand record noted by Edgar & Connor (2000, 2010) is however, probably a genuine naturalisation stemming from early shipping.

ATTRIBUTION

Prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN, 29 May 2020. Description adapted from Edgar & Connor (2000).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Digitaria setigera* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/digitaria-setigera/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/digitaria-setigera/>