Eleocharis sphacelata

COMMON NAME
kutakuta, spikes of doom, bamboo spike sedge, tall spike sedge

SYNONYMS
None

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Eleocharis sphacelata R.Br.

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

NVS CODE
ELESPH

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 100

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous

Whangapoua, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Eleocharis sphacelata. Photographer: Wayne Bennett, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT
Coastal to lower montane (but mainly in lowland areas). Preferring sunny situations where it usually grows in still deep water such as along lake and pond margins often amongst raupō (*Typha orientalis* C.B.Presl), *Machaerina articulata* (R.Br.) Koyama. Rarely bordering slowly flowing streams and rivers, or in burn pools and damp depressions within peat bogs.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rhizome 10–15 mm diameter, stout and lignaceous, creeping. **Culms** 0.3–1.2 m long, 4–12 mm diameter, usually close-packed, linear with obvious internal transverse septa set at regular intervals of 10–100 mm, apices blunted-ended unless fertile. **Basal sheaths** grey. chartaceous with an oblique orifice. **Roots** 2 mm diameter, red-brown, in a group of up to 5 from the base of each culm. **Spikelet** 20–70 × 5–10 mm, cylindrical with an acute apex. **Glumes**: lowest glume sterile, almost completely surrounding base of spikelet, very short; upper glumes numerous, imbricate, 6–8 mm long, obovate-oblong, obtuse, not keeled but with a strong median nerve and numerous fine lateral nerves. **Hypogynous bristles** 6–10, usually greater than nut, with rather large, sparse, retrorse teeth. **Stamens** 3. **Style** 3-fid, occasionally stigmas 2, or all connate to the apex. **Nut** 2.0–2.5 mm long (excluding persistent style-base), orbicular, biconvex, the surface covered with hexagonal reticulations, pale brown, surmounted by the persistent, dark brown, conic, swollen base of the style.

SIMILAR TAXA

None. Easily distinguished from other species of *Eleocharis* by the much large soft, hollow, transversely septate culms. Could be confused with sterile specimens of *Machaerina articulata* but that species has much longer (up to 2 m), dark green to almost brown green, rigidly firm culms with acute rather than blunt-ended apices.

FLOWERING

August–December

FRUITING

November–May

LIFE CYCLE

Bristly nuts are dispersed by water and possibly wind and attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Can be tricky. Fresh seed germinates best if allowed to float on water overlying potting mix, gradually reduce the water level so that the germinating plants can naturally “float” on to the underlying soil. Plants do best if their rootstock is submerged.

ETYMOLOGY

eleocharis: Charm of the swamp
sphacelata: Diseased (appearance of the spike)

CULTURAL USE

The long culms, when dried, were sometimes used by Maori for their tukutuku panels.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/eleocharis-sphacelata/