Hierochloe fusca

COMMON NAME
seabird holy grass

SYNONYMS
None

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Hierochloe fusca Zotov

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

NVS CODE
HIEFUS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 84

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP
2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Kapiti Island, South Island (western and southern coasts from Westport), Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Antipodes Islands and Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku.

HABITAT
Coastal. Associated with seal haulouts, and seabird roosts and nesting areas. Mainly found on offshore islands. On the Chatham Islands it has been gathered well inland from peat lake margins.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Robust or somewhat lax, aromaitc, tufted grass often forming stout tussocks in or near seal haul outs or sea bird nesting grounds. **Leaf-sheath** glabrous, more or less striate. **Ligule** 3–5 mm, chartaceous, hairy, erose to variously lobed. **Leaf-blade** 300–750(–800) × 9–12 mm, tapering, lower surface glabrous, upper surface scabrid on the main (prominent) ribs; margins thick, toothed. **Culm** 0.6–1.5 m, internodes glabrous, ridged. **Panicle** 150–380 mm, erect; branches 1–2 at each node, glabrous, naked below, spikelets densely crowded above; pedicels scabrid or villous. **Glumes** subequal, membranous with wide scarious margins and tips, ovate-lanceolate, acute, galbrous, keeled; upper 7–9 mm, 3-nerved. **Florets** included by glumes, brown to dark brown at maturity. **Male florets** with lemma 6–8 mm, oblong-ovate, lobes 1–1.25 mm, erose and scarious-tipped, sparsely finely scabrid, long hairs at base, margins sparsely long-ciliate; awns 3–7 mm, slender, straight or slightly curved, insertion 1-2 mm below apex; palea 5–6 mm, membranous, keels ciliate; lodicules 0.5–1 mm, ovate, acute, irregularly 1-2-lobed, glabrous; callus hairs to 1 mm; anthers 2.5–3.5 mm. **Perfect florets** with lemma 5 mm, narrow-ovate, glabrous, apex minutely hairy, mucro 0-0.5 mm; palea about equal to lemma in length, keel toothed to base, ovate-lanceolate; lodicules 0.5 mm, glabrous; anthers 1.5–2 mm; ovary 1 mm, stigma-styles 5–6 mm. **Seed** 2–2.5 × 0.75 mm. **Spikelets** sometimes vivaporous.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to the grasses of New Zealand

SIMILAR TAXA

Superficially similar to *Anthoxanthum redolens* P.Royen and *Hierochloe brunonis* Hook.f., species with which it may on occasion grow. It is distinguished from both (usually) by its much taller, robust tufted habit. In perfect flowers of this species the florets are distinctly awned, their lemmas are scarcely bearded, and the awns of the male florets are inserted near the lemma apex rather than near the base.

FLOWERING

November–January

FRUITING

December–April (–June)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and the division of whole plants. Prefers a damp, fertile soil in full sun.

THREATS

A local endemic, sparsely distributed throughout its range. As a species of guano-rich habitats it is quite likely that it has undergone some past range contraction, and in the South Island this may even be continuing. Naturally Uncommon and Biologically Sparse.

ETYMOLOGY

hierochloe: From the Greek hieros ‘sacred’ and chloa ‘grass’ meaning holy grass. European species of this grass were once strewn on church floors.
fusca: Brown tinged with grey or black

WHERE TO BUY

Occasionally offered by specialist native plant nurseries

NOTES ON TAXONOMY

Doubtfully distinct from *Anthoxanthum redolens* and *Hierochloe brunonis*. The three have the same chromosome number and nrDNA ITS sequences and appear to intergrade. Kapiti Island plants in particular are vegetatively rather different from the robust tufted grass more typical of this species in the rest of its range. Nevertheless Dr H. E. Connor (pers. comm. 2006) has advised that the floral distinctions hold, and that in his revision of the genus he is likely to maintain all three species.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by Peter J. de Lange 30 August 2000. 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.
Johnson AT, Smith HA. 1986. Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd, Buckenhill, UK.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/hierochloe-fusca/