

Schoenoplectus californicus

COMMON NAME

Californian bulrush

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Schoenoplectus californicus (C.A.Mey.) Palla

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Tall (up to 4 m) dense clump forming rush, with no apparent leaves, dark green rounded stems (triangular near the base) and rusty brown scaly flower heads formed near the tip of each stem.

DISTRIBUTION

Restricted to Northern Wairoa River, Northland and Waikato River delta where it is abundant. A few other sites resulting from plantings.

HABITAT

Coastal river banks and estuaries.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A tall rhizomatous sedge 1–3–(4.2) m × 10–35 mm, with green to dark green stems triangular near the base, round in upper parts. **Leaves** are reduced to brown papery basal sheaths. **Inflorescence** apparently sub-terminal dense; rays 4–10, pendulous, each with 1–5 spikelets on ultimate rays, primary rays usually 3–10 cm long. **Spikelets** rusty brown, ovoid-ellipsoid to cylindrical, 5–12 × 2.5–3 mm. **Nut** cream to grey, broadly obovate-elliptic, plano-convex, 2.9 × 1.7 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

The native sedge *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*. Key differences are the round bluish-green stem, smaller size and clustered, not drooping flower heads of this species. *Schoenoplectus pungens* (Vahl) Palla differs by its consistently triangular (in cross section) culms, and sessile 1–3 spikelets. Overall it is a much smaller plant than either of the other two species.

FLOWERING

November–April

FLOWER COLOURS

Brown

FRUITING

November–April

LIFE CYCLE

Long-lived perennial. Seed is viable, but seedlings have not been observed in the field. Movement of rhizome fragments by water is likely to be a major dispersal mechanism. Seed is long-lived, the surrounding bristles readily attach themselves to feathers, fur and clothing. This species was distributed in the past as a plant suitable for constructed wetlands to treat farm/domestic effluent.

YEAR NATURALISED

1992



ORIGIN

Western North and South America, possibly eastern parts of the Pacific

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Accidental, likely through contamination of ballast

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not usually controlled in New Zealand, but may be controlled manually, mechanically or herbicidally depending on situation.

TOLERANCES

Prefers brackish water, cold tolerant.

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange PJ, Gardner RO, Champion PD, Tanner CC. 1998. *Schoenoplectus californicus* (Cyperaceae) in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 36(3): 319–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1998.9512573>.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/schoenoplectus-californicus/>