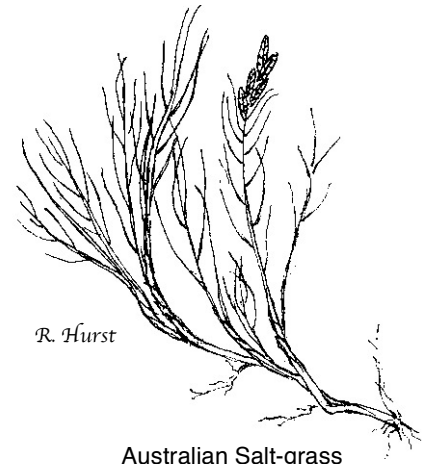


THREE GRASSES – DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE? ...Chris Morrissey

Over 1000 species of grasses are indigenous to Australia. Since European settlement, many have disappeared, to the detriment of fauna and other flora, which rely on the grasses for their habitat. ANGAIR, along with other conservation groups, is concerned to preserve the grasslands containing these grasses, where possible. So let's start by finding something about them. All three species discussed in this article can be found in our region. The commonality is hidden in the names of the genus or the species.

Australian Salt-grass *Distichlis distichophylla* The genus name comes from the Greek, *distichos* (two-rowed), referring to the leaf, and *lisse* (smooth), referring to either the leaves or the spikelets. The species name has the same root – *distichos* (two-rowed) and *phylla* (leaf). The common name refers to its habitat.

This grass is a perennial, with rhizomes, and separate male and female plants (dioecious). However, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two genders. It spreads along the ground in saltmarshes with moist, saline soils, but can also climb through taller vegetation. The leafy parts are usually upright, and the thin, stiff, but smooth, leaves are alternate on opposite sides of the stem and up to 5 cm long. The flowers are short and terminal, with only a few on the male, and more flowers are crowded on the female plant. They appear from October to April. This grass is prolific along the Anglesea River, particularly near the boat sheds on the east side.

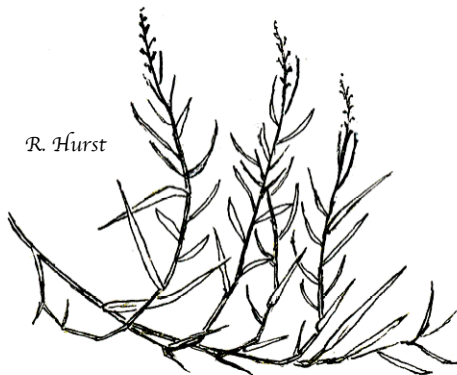


R. Hurst

Australian Salt-grass

Hairy Rice-grass *Tetrarrhena distichophylla* From the Greek, *tetra* (four), and *arrhen* (male), referring to the four anthers on the flower. The species name is as for the Australian Salt-grass. The common name refers to the hairy leaves.

This grass is a rhizomatous perennial, with bi-sexual flowers. The fine leaves are hairy, alternate along the stem, up to 6 cm long, and slightly wider than those of the Salt-grass. It forms a mat in sandy or rocky soil, in dryish open forests. The flowers are on stems 2–4 cm long, and can be found between September and March.

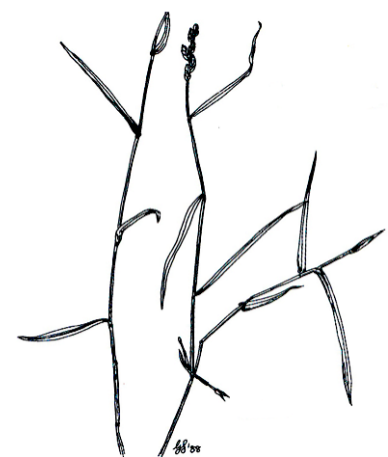


R. Hurst

Hairy Rice-grass

Forest Wire-grass *Tetrarrhena juncea* The species name is from the Greek *juncea* (rush-like), and the common name refers to the habitat. and the texture of the leaves.

Also a perennial with rhizomes, this grass scrambles or climbs for up to eight metres. The wiry stems can have many branches, and form roots at the lower nodes. The flat, rough leaves, up to 8 cm long, are widely spread, and alternate along the stems. It grows best in moist soils through the forest, and regrows quickly after fire, helping to prevent soil erosion. It can become thick and impenetrable under the right conditions. The bi-sexual flowers are spike-like and short, appearing between November and April. (The drawing of Forest Wire-grass is from Reference 2, page 298.)



Forest Wire-grass

References:

1. Walsh, N.G. and Entwisle, T.J. 1994, *Flora of Victoria* vol. 2. Inkata Press, Melbourne.
2. Gray, Marilyn and John Knight (editors) 2001, 3rd edition, *Flora of Melbourne: a guide to the indigenous plants of the Greater Melbourne area*. Flemington: Hyland House

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