



PLECTRACHNE PUNGENS

Curly Spinifex

A densely tufted to cushion-like perennial, 50–80 cm high. *Culms* erect or ascending, many from the base, more or less branched, smooth, hairless, rigid. *Nodes* 2–4, smooth. *Leaves* on the culms, at first green, but becoming straw-coloured or purplish. *Leaf sheaths* narrow, keeled, firm, striate, persistent and overlapping from the base, where they tend to stand out from the stem, smooth, but sometimes sticky, not exceeding the internodes, shouldered at the ligule with a tuft of hairs. *Ligule* reduced to a short, dense rim of hairs. *Leaf blades* narrow, the margins strongly in-rolled, 10–25 cm long, rigid and sharply pointed, curving outward from the stem, rough along the margin, otherwise smooth with two glandular swellings (pulvini) on either side of the base of the blade, disarticulating at the ligule from the persistent sheaths in the lower part of the culms.

Inflorescence a narrow panicle, at first partly enclosed by the uppermost sheath, but later exerted and then the panicle broadening, up to 18 cm long. *Spikelets* (S) solitary, about 15 mm long, including the awns, straw-coloured, often purplish-tinged, at maturity disarticulating above the persistent glumes. *Florets* 2 or more, bisexual, except the uppermost ones. *Glumes* (G_1 , G_2) similar, delicate, faintly 3-nerved, narrow, terminating in a fine awn-like point, 8–12 mm long; the upper (G_2) slightly shorter and broader than the lower (G_1). *Lemmas* (L) broad at the base, thickened in the lower half, which is shortly hairy on the back, 3-nerved, the tip deeply divided into 3 awn-like fine points, the middle one about twice the length of the body and curving outwards. *Paleas* (P) nearly the length of the body of the lemma, narrow, oblong, shortly 2-pointed, 2-nerved and 2-keeled, concave on the back between the keels, with a horizontal thickening about $\frac{3}{4}$ up the back, slightly hairy on the upper keel and the cross-line. *Anthers* 3, 2–3.5 mm long, yellow.

This grass is one of the soft spinifexes. It generally grows on poor soils, often associated with the hard (*Triodia* spp.) spinifexes on dry, skeletal sites. It occurs only in the northern, arid part of the region.

REFERENCES

Bailey (1902),¹ p. 1910 (as *Triraphis pungens*); Gardner (1952),² p. 83; Lazarides (1970),³ pp. 204–5; Black (1978),⁴ pp. 125–26; Jessop (1981),⁵ pp. 446–47.

KEY TO SPECIES

Leaves very finely rolled, sharply pointed. Glumes 12–15 mm;
lemmas 4.5–5 mm.

P. helmsii^{4,5}

Leaves finely rolled, not as sharply pointed. Glumes 8–12 mm;
lemmas 2–3 mm (Curly spinifex)

P. pungens^{1,2,3,5}