



# SEHIMA NERVOSUM

## Rat's-tail Grass

A strongly tufted, erect perennial, up to 1 m tall. *Culms* slender, usually unbranched, with 4–5 nodes, smooth, slightly striate. *Nodes* hairless or lightly bearded. *Leaves* mostly on the culms. *Leaf sheaths* rounded, smooth or only slightly hairy, at first tight, but later becoming loose. *Ligule* a rim of fine hairs, which are markedly longer on the lateral margins. *Leaf blades* rather narrow, up to 30 cm long, tapering to a fine point, slightly rough down the margins, hairless, often bluish-green.

*Inflorescence* a simple, almost cylindrical raceme, 7–12 cm long, slightly curved, the joints or internodes of the raceme axis and the pedicels of the pedicellate spikelets rather flattened and densely bearded along the angles with white hairs. *Spikelets* ( $S_1$ ,  $S_2$ ) in pairs, closely adpressed to the axis, dissimilar in sex and to some extent in form, breaking up at maturity and falling entire, together with the adjacent joints and pedicels. *Florets* 2, in both spikelets; in the sessile spikelet, the lower floret male, the upper bisexual; in the pedicellate spikelet, the lower floret male or neuter, the upper male. *Sessile spikelet* ( $S_1$ ) fertile and awned, 8–10 mm long, pale-greenish, narrow. *Glumes* ( $G_1$ ,  $G_2$ ) dissimilar; the lower glume ( $G_1$ ) strongly 2-keeled, 6-nerved (4 between the keels), the apex divided into 2 points and slightly silky-hairy, the back of the keels rough; the upper ( $G_2$ ) shorter, boat-shaped, slightly keeled in the upper part, faintly 5-nerved, the apex slightly winged and produced into a bristle about 7 mm long. *Lemma* ( $L_1$ ) of lower male floret about the length of  $G_2$ , thinly membranous, slightly 2-keeled with the margins folded inwards, faintly 2-nerved, 2-pointed and silky-hairy along the margins in the upper part. *Palea* ( $P_1$ ) thinly membranous, about  $\frac{2}{3}$  the length of  $L_1$ , 2-nerved and 2-keeled, the margins sharply folded inwards at the keels. *Anthers* 3, 1.5 mm long. *Lemma* ( $L_2$ ) of the upper floret about the length of  $L_1$ , the margins conspicuously silky-hairy, faintly 2-nerved, the tip produced into a long kneed awn 35–45 mm long, the lower  $\frac{1}{3}$  of which is twisted and brown in colour. *Palea* ( $P_2$ ) 2-keeled, faintly 2-nerved, membranous and lightly silky-hairy in its upper part. *Anthers* 3, 3 mm long. *Pedicellate spikelet* ( $S_2$ ) about the same length as and largely concealing  $S_1$ , male, unawned. *Glumes* ( $G_1$ ,  $G_2$ ) dissimilar; the lower ( $G_1$ ) slightly asymmetrical, broad, greyish-brown to purplish in colour, tough and strongly 2-keeled with the margins folded in at the keels, prominently 7-nerved (5 between the keels), hairy along the upper margins, 2-pointed; the upper ( $G_2$ ) without a bristle, not keeled, otherwise like  $G_2$  of the sessile spikelet. *Lemma* ( $L_1$ ) and *Palea* ( $P_1$ ) of the lower floret like  $L_1$  and  $P_1$  of the sessile spikelet. *Anthers*, when present, 3, 3 mm long. *Lemma* ( $L_2$ ) of the upper floret unawned, faintly 2-nerved, membranous, silky-hairy along its margins. *Palea* ( $P_2$ ) membranous, 2-keeled. *Anthers* 3, 1.5 mm long.

This is a poor-quality grass, found extensively throughout northern Australia, but usually not locally abundant. It is usually found growing in poor soils, often associated with *Themeda australis*, in grassland of the open forest country and is conspicuous by the prominent nerves and the grey-brown colouration of the broad, lower glume of the pedicellate spikelet. The rather sparse nature of its foliage makes it of little value as a natural forage species.

### REFERENCES

Bailey (1902), p. 1855 (as *Ischaemum laxum*); Gardner (1952), p. 301; Vickery (1961), p. 21.

### KEY TO SPECIES

Only one species occurs in southern Queensland.