



SPATHIA NEUROSA

Spathe Grass

An annual that may be single-stemmed or tufted, 10–80 cm tall. *Culms* erect or bent at the lowest node, singly or numerous from the base, slender, smooth, branched. *Nodes* 2–3, smooth or shortly hairy, the internodes more or less exceeding the leaf sheaths. *Leaves* on the culms, green, rapidly becoming straw-papery and tinged purplish. *Leaf sheaths* loose, smooth, striate, becoming progressively modified up the culm into large, showily, spathe-like structures. *Ligule* a papery 1–2.5 mm rim bearing stiff hairs. *Leaf blades* up to 15 cm long and 2–4 mm wide, tapering from the base to a fine point, disarticulating at the ligule, becoming progressively smaller to absent on the upper inflated sheaths.

Inflorescence a spatheate racemose panicle with the large, inflated spathes completely containing 3 (sometimes up to 5) slightly subdigitate and shortly stalked racemes, 3–3.5 cm long, the spathes up to 10 cm long and straw-papery. *Spikelets* (S_1 , S_2) in pairs, one sessile, the other pedicellate, both covered with golden-brown hairs, closely overlapping, not alike, at maturity disarticulating obliquely at the base and falling entire with the rachis joints. *Sessile spikelet* (S_1) 5–6 mm long, excluding the awn. *Florets* 2, the lower reduced to a lemma and sterile, the upper bisexual. *Glumes* (G_1 , G_2) dissimilar; the lower glume (G_1) toughened and rigid, 7-nerved, 5 mm, tapering from about $\frac{1}{3}$ up to a 2-pointed, blunt tip, keeled along the margins in the upper part, densely covered on the back with long, tubercle-based brown hairs, the marginal ones up to 6 mm long, with shorter, white hairs intermixed; the upper (G_2) slightly longer and narrower, membranous, except down the keel, 3-nerved, strongly keeled in the upper half down the mid-vein and concave between the nerves, hairy on the rounded lower part of the back, extending into long hairs on the keel in the upper part. *Lemmas* (L_1 , L_2) dissimilar; L_1 delicately membranous, 2.5 mm long; L_2 narrow and straplike, 1-nerved, produced into a long, twisted and kneed, dark brown awn up to 3.5 mm long. *Palea* absent in both florets. *Anthers* 3, 0.6 mm long, yellow. *Pedicellate spikelet* (S_2) without awn, 5–6 mm long, completely sterile and reduced to the glumes and occasionally a minute lemma. *Glumes* (G_1 , G_2) dissimilar; the lower glume (G_1) the length of the spikelet, 6 mm long, 9-nerved in the lower half with more in the upper half; long, tubercle-based, brown hairs along the margins and centre-line of the back, thickened only along the nerves; the upper (G_2) about $\frac{3}{4}$ the length of G_1 , membranous, 3-nerved, hairy on the back with long, tubercle-based hairs along the margins.

This grass is uncommon. Usually it is found on clay soils, such as the Mitchell grasslands in the north and west of the region.

REFERENCES

Blake (1944b), pp. 46–50; (1948b), p. 160; Lazarides (1970), pp. 228–30; Jessop (1981), p. 494.

KEY TO SPECIES

This is a monospecific genus endemic to northern Australia.