

# Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass

## (*Sisyrinchium hitchcockii*)

### ENDANGERED



Flower (left), habit (center), and habitat (right) of Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass. Photos by ODA staff (left and right), and Gerald D. Carr (center; Courtesy of OregonFlora). If downloading images from this website, please credit the photographer.

#### Family

Iridaceae

#### Plant description

A rhizomatous perennial herb with 1-3 erect to ascending, mostly unbranched stems. Leaves are shorter than the stems, lax to ascending or strict, and 3-4 mm wide with smooth to finely denticulate margins. Inflorescences are terminal on the stem or pedunculate, with outer bracts longer than inner bracts. There are 2-7 flowers on stout, glabrous pedicels that slightly exceed the inner bracts. The perianth is 14-17mm long, a dark reddish-purple (rarely bluish violet), tips truncate or notched, lacking or infrequently with a yellow eye at the inner base of the corolla. The filament column is 6-9 mm long and purple with glandular hairs at the base of the connate filaments. Anthers are yellow-orange 1.5-2.8 mm long. Fruits are globose capsules 6-7mm long, beige to light brown. Seeds are globose, wrinkled and lacking obvious depressions.

#### Distinguishing characteristics

*Sisyrinchium hitchcockii* often occurs with *S. bellum* and *S. idahoense* var. *idahoense*. Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass can be distinguished by the lack of an obvious yellow perianth base, longer perianth, and a longer (> 6mm) and distinctly purple filament column.

#### When to survey

Surveys for Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass should be completed when the species is in flower, from May through mid-June when it can be distinguished from *S. bellum* and *S. idahoense* var. *idahoense*, which occupy the same habitat and are vegetatively similar.

**Habitat**

Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass occupies Willamette Valley prairie habitat ranging from about 150-1000 feet elevation. Habitat includes open, dry meadows or grasslands that are dry in summer and saturated in the winter and spring. The species can also occur in wet seeps along roadsides. Species that are most associated with *S. hitchcockii* include *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Danthonia californica*, *Camassia quamash*, *Aira caryophyllea*, *Ranunculus occidentalis*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *Geranium oregonum*, *Festuca arundinacea*, *Hocus lanatus*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, in addition to co-occurring *S. bellum* and *S. idahoense* var. *idahoense*.

**Range**

Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass occurs in Oregon and California ranging from Benton County south to Douglas County in Oregon, and Humboldt County in California. The single Humboldt County occurrence was last observed in 1938, co-occurring with *S. bellum*.

**Oregon counties**

Benton, Linn, Lane, Douglas

**Federal status**

Species of concern

**Threats**

The main threat to *S. hitchcockii* is wet prairie habitat loss due to agriculture and development, and other anthropogenic intrusion such as mowing and herbicide leading to fragmented populations and degraded habitat. Exotic species (invasive annual grasses, nonnative pasture grasses, blackberry, and European hawthorn) compete with *S. hitchcockii* in remaining available habitat. Issues related to small population size also pose a threat, including declines in reproductive individuals, genetic diversity, and seed production and viability.

**References**

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Oregon Biodiversity Information Center (ORBIC). 2013. Climate change vulnerability index assessment for Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium hitchcockii*). Institute for Natural Resources, Portland State University, Portland, OR.

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