AN INSIGNIFICANT-LOOKING TUFT

NAME: ***Corynephorus canescens*** (L.) P.Beauv.
Common name: grey hair-grass or gray clubawn grass

Habitat | H2330 - Corineforeti (Open *Corynephorus* and *Agrostis* grasslands on inland sand dunes).

Location | In Italy, *Corynephorus canescens* is located in a few sites in Piedmont and Lombardy, on acidic, nutrient-poor substrates, on the hillocks of Lomellina and along the Sesia and Ticino rivers; it is found from the plain up to about 250 meters above sea level.

Recognition | *Corynephorus canescens* is not easy to recognize and can be confused with species of the genus *Aira*, from which it differs in that the spikelets forming the inflorescence carry a club-shaped awn enlarged at the apex.

Facts | As a keystone species of corynephorus grasslands, *Corynephorus canescens* is important for biodiversity conservation, especially since it is found only in the Po Valley. This is one of the areas in Italy where human impact is most severe, and the grassland habitat has undergone drastic reduction in the last 50-70 years. in Italy, *Corynephorus canescens* is a species of conservation importance, included in the Italian Red List as a species at risk of extinction (IUCN category: EN, Endangered). One factor threatening the conservation of the species may be the climate changes underway, in particular the episodes of severe summer aridity which cause significant damage to populations.

Friendly species | By digging into the ground, ants and wild rabbits help maintain a loose substrate suitable for the establishment and germination of *Corynephorus* seeds.

Enemy species | Unless managed, invasive allochthonous woody species (*Robinia pseudoacacia, Prunus serotina, Ailanthus altissima*) quickly colonize *Corynephorus* grasslands. Where populations are large, the Eastern cottontail rabbit (invasive allochthonous species) can also have a negative impact due to the abundant droppings it produces, which enrich the substrate with nutrients, thereby disadvantaging the establishment of *Corynephorus* grasslands.

Human use | *Corynephorus canescens* is used as an ornamental species, and is already commercially available in the 'Spiky Blue' cultivar, used for creating flowerbeds, rock gardens, and to decorate paving. To contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, **the wild species should be used**.

Interesting facts | The most substantial populations of this species are found in correspondence with the so-called "dossi della Lomellina" (modest internal continental sand dunes, unique in the Italian territory) These hillocks have been conserved only because they lie within military areas and private hunting reserves, where the levelling that occurred elsewhere to make way for agriculture, has been prevented.

> **Intervention Sites**: the Ticino valley (Novara province), Ansa di Castelnovate (VA).
> **Type of Intervention**: Where corynephorus grassland is already present in the intervention sites: improvement of the structure (through mowing and cutting of native and non-native woody species), floristic enrichment (by planting individuals of species typical of habitat 2330, such as *Festuca filiformis, Potentilla pusilla, Pethroragia saxifraga, Armeria arenaria* and *Jasione montana*).
In areas devoid of *Corynephorus* grassland: restoration of habitat 2330 from scratch through mowing interventions, uprooting of woody species, and spreading of sandy material raked from areas where the habitat is already present (containing seeds and propagules of the species that constitute *Corynephorus* grassland).

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