

Bulbophyllum pygmaeum

COMMON NAMES

pygmy tree orchid, bulbophyllum

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Epiphytic or rupestral, rhizomatous, perennial forming widely spreading or diffuse mats up to 200 mm or more in diameter. **Rhizomes** heavily branched and intertwined, vermiform, pale pink to white, more or less fleshy, spongy; roots numerous slightly finer than rhizomes otherwise every similar. **Pseudobulbs** 3–5 mm diameter, green, bright green to pale green, globose, rugose, becoming deeply furrowed and wrinkled with age; each bearing a single leaf arising from the top within a somewhat prominent circular rim. **Leaf** subsessile to shortly petiolate up to 1.5 mm long; lamina 4–10 × 2–4 mm, dark green to green (rarely reddish green), oblong-ovate to almost orbicular, apex obtuse, upper surface minutely scabrid; undersides prominently keeled. **Flower** solitary, located on the terminus of a greenish valvate capsule comprising the ovary; peduncle arising from base of pseudobulb, up to 2.5–3.5 mm long at flowering, usually elongating in fruit. **Floral bract** 1–(2), campanulate-tubular to funneliform, membranous, hyaline or pale white. **Pedicel** very short (0.5–0.7 mm long), coarsely hirsute; ovary ovoid-ellipsoid, coarsely hirsute, splitting lengthwise at dehiscence. **Perianth** 1.5–2.0 mm long, white. **Sepals** minutely hairy, dorsal sepal shorter than lateral sepals. **Petals** broad, almost meeting behind column. **Labellum** ovate-oblong, obtuse, more or less thickened, roofing over pouch formed by lateral sepals and column foot. **Column** barely as long as its foot; wing not exceeding anther.

SIMILAR TAXA

Bulbophyllum pygmaeum could be confused with *B. tuberculatum* but that species has a less diffuse, more compact growth habit; much larger dark green to maroon green, erect, ovoid to ovoid-ellipsoid pseudobulbs; larger and longer, linear-oblong leaves (up to 50 × 5 mm), usually more than one flower; and flowers that have orange to red labella, and white or pale cream petals and sepals. The leaves and ovary of *B. tuberculatum* lack the minute, coarse hairs that are a feature of *B. pygmaeum*. The ovary of *B. tuberculatum* does not at maturity split to become valvate, nor does it retain the flower remnants on the uppermost valve.

DISTRIBUTION

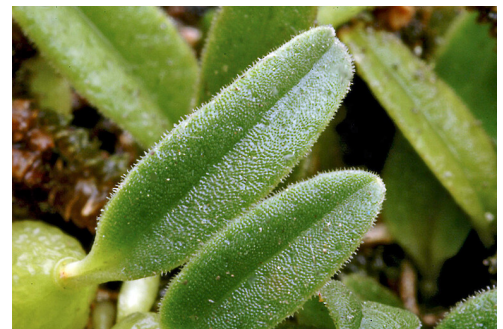
Endemic. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Mostly epiphytic on forest tree trunks and branches, sometimes on fallen logs, and found as also rupestral on rocks, cliff faces or banks.



Spent flower and leaves. Bushy Park, Whanganui. Apr 2012. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Leaves. Bushy Park, Whanganui. Apr 2012. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

GENUS

Bulbophyllum

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Bulbophyllum pygmaeum (Sm.) Lindl.

SYNONYMS

Ichthyostomum pygmaeum (Sm.) D.L.Jones, M.A.Clem. et Molloy

TAXONOMIC NOTES

The generic distinction of *Ichthyostomum* from *Bulbophyllum* was always considered unclear and many botanists did not accept the division. Recently Australian orchidologists have rejected this genus and returned to a broader circumscription of *Bulbophyllum* (P. Weston pers. comm. 2014). This view is accepted here.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December–January

FRUITING

January–May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a hanging basket in standard orchid mix. Often can be strapped to a tree trunk and provided it is kept moist during the drier months it grows readily. This species does best in semi-shade. Should not be removed from the wild.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for April 2013](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

pygmaeum: Pigmy

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to native orchids of New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

BULPYG

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 38

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description adapted from Moore & Edgar (1970). Some of this factsheet information is derived from [Flora of New Zealand Online](#) and is used under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand](#) licence.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Bulbophyllum pygmaeum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/bulbophyllum-pygmaeum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/bulbophyllum-pygmaeum/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026