Caladenia alata

BIOSTATUS
Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, SO
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Terrestrial dark green to reddish-green early spring flowering orchid usually occurring at solitary plants sometimes as small colonies of up to 20 plants. All parts finely but sparsely glandular hairy. **Leaf** solitary up to 60 × 3 mm long, linear, dark green to reddish-green. **Stem** erect, slender somewhat wiry, up to 100 mm tall, thin and very wiry, sparsely eglandular-glandular hairy. **Floral bracts** 1–(2). **Flowers** 1–(2) up to 10 mm diameter, in lax racemes, perianth very pale mauve, pale pink, reddish or white often suffused pale china blue, if darker coloured usually fading to pink or white near flower centre. **Sepals** up to 3 mm long, narrowly-lanceolate to broadly lanceolate, apex acute to subacute; dorsal sepal erect, others spreading. **Petals** up to 3 mm long, lanceolate to broadly lanceolate, apex sharply acute, spreading or projecting forwards. **Labellum** 3-lobed, marked with transverse cerise bars, disc with 2 more or less equal lines of stalked calli extending nearly to apex, stalks white, clavate, callus heads yellow, lateral lobes erect, column-embracing, more or less entire, often finely crimpled to crenulate toward mid-lobe; mid-lobe broadly triangular, strongly recurved under labellum, margins entire, usually bearing a solitary, flattened, orange or yellow callus on either side of mid-lobe base. **Column** erect to slightly recurved, white or pale pink or mauve, marked with up to 5 darker transverse, red to cerise bars, column wings distinctly broadening toward apex.



Piwhane / Spirits Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 06/09/2008, Licence: CC BY.



Lake Ohia. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 05/09/2008, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily recognised by the early flowering habit, small size and solitary flower. The flower is often suffused pale china blue, or pinkish, pale mauve or even red. Sometimes it can be completely white. The tepals are distinctively sharply acute. The labellum offers the main distinguishing characters, the lamina, side-lobes are marked with cerise bars. The labellum calli are in two rows, spheroidal and yellow-topped, while the mid-lobe has a distinctive curled under yellow or orange tip and it usually bears at its base, on either side, a single flattened orange or dark sulphur yellow marginal callus. The column is weakly curved and marked with cerise bars.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island (from Te Paki to about Rotorua thence disjunct to Horowhenua). Exact New Zealand distribution still unknown it was recognised from New Zealand only since the 1980s. Also Australia.

HABITAT
Coastal to lowland (more rarely montane—up to 800 m a.s.l.). Often in gumland scrub or on open clay pans, in skeletal soils on steep rocky ridges, on the margins of peat bogs or within open sinter and rock in and around geothermal vents. More rarely found in the leaf litter under tall manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*)-dominated scrub or within seral forest. Usually in dry sites and plants are usually withered off and gone by November.

THREATS
In New Zealand *Caladenia alata* is a biologically sparse species usually occurring in diffuse, often widely scattered populations of few to many individuals.

GENUS
Caladenia

FAMILY
Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY
Caladenia alata R.Br.

SYNONYMS
Caladenia catenata var. exigua (Cheeseman) W.M. Curtis; Caladenia minor var. exigua Cheeseman; Caladenia exigua Cheeseman; Caladenia holmesii Rupp; Caladenia carnea var. alata (R.Br.) Domin.; Caladenia carnea var. exigua (Cheeseman) Rupp; Petalochilus alatus (R.Br.) D.L.Jones et M.A. Clem.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Jones et al. (2001) revived the genus *Petalochilus* R.S.Rogers (erected by Rogers (1924) for what has come to be viewed as a peloric state of *Caladenia* R.Br.—see Moore & Edgar (1970)) for a distinct clade of mostly New Zealand orchids that had usually been referred to as *Caladenia*. Subsequently Hopper et al. (2004) showed how the reorganisation of *Caladenia* by Jones et al. (2001) was unworkable and they recommended a return to *Caladenia* and the other allied Australian genera that had been recognised previously. Following discussion with S. Hopper and P. Weston (pers. comm. 2011, 2014) the treatment of Hopper et al. (2004) is preferred to that of Jones et al. (2001) and so followed here.

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August–November

FRUITING
October–January

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult—should not be removed from the wild

ETYMOLOGY
alata: From the Latin ala ‘wing’ meaning ‘winged’

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to native orchids of New Zealand

NVS CODE
CALALA

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, SO, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: SO, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, TO
2004 | Range Restricted
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, RR, SO, Sp 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

de Lange P, Rolfe J, St George I, Sawyer J. 2007. Wild orchids of the lower North Island. Department of Conservation, Wellington, NZ. 194 p.
Hopper SD, Brown AP. 2004 Robert Brown's *Caladenia* revisited, including a revision of its sister genera *Cyanicula*, *Ericksonella* and *Pheladenia* (Caladeniinae: Orchidaceae). *Australian Systematic Botany 17(2)*: 171–240. https://doi.org/10.1071/SB03002.
Jones DL, Clements MA, Sharma IK, Mackenzie AM. 2001. A New Classification of *Caladenia* R.Br. (Orchidaceae). *The Orchadian 13(9)*: 389–419. https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/310770#page/1/mode/1up.
Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.
Rogers RS. 1924. *Petalochilus*: a New Genus of New Zealand Orchids. *The Journal of Botany 62*: 65–67. https://archive.bsbi.org/Journal_of_Botany_1924.pdf

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description based on herbarium specimens and subsequently published in de Lange et al. (2007).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/caladenia-alata/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026