Corybas cheesemanii

**COMMON NAME**
Helmet Orchid, Cheesemans Spider Orchid

**SYNONYMS**
Corysanthes cheesemanii Hook.f.

**FAMILY**
Orchidaceae

**AUTHORITY**
Corybas cheesemanii (Hook.f. ex Kirk) Kuntze

**FLORA CATEGORY**
Vascular – Native

**ENDEMIC TAXON**
Yes

**ENDEMIC GENUS**
No

**ENDEMIC FAMILY**
No

**STRUCTURAL CLASS**
Orchids

**NVS CODE**
CORCHE

**CHROMOSOME NUMBER**
2n = 54+2

**CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS**
2012 | Not Threatened

**PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES**
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

**DISTRIBUTION**
Endemic. Three Kings, North, South and Chatham Islands.

**HABITAT**
Coastal to montane (up to 1000 m a.s.l.). Usually found in tall scrub or forest, in dark shaded sites, partially buried in deep, moist, semi-rotted leaf litter, especially under kanuka (Kunzea ericoides, K. robusta, K. serotina and K. triregensis) and Beech (Fuscospora and Lophozonia spp.). Often associated with Corybas cryptanthus.
FEATURES
Diminutive, winter to spring green perennial herb up to 25 mm tall when flowering, up to 220 mm tall when fruiting. Stem, leaves usually, and sometimes also the flowers completely or partially buried within leaf litter. Tubers spheroidal to ovoid, borne on greatly elongated lateral roots up to 200 mm away from current seasons plant. Stem erect buried within leaf mould. Leaf solitary, sessile, 10-20 mm long, pale green to green above, somewhat silvery-green below, orbicular, orbicular-cordate, sometimes leaf reduced to a small green scale. Floral bract smaller than the bright yellow-green ovary, and usually placed well below it. Flower 1(-2), placed directly over leaf. Ovary erect. Perianth 10-14 mm tall. Dorsal sepal helmet-like (galeate), arching completely over labellum, acute, dark pink, purple-grey, maroon, greyish white (mushroom grey) greyish-white flecked with purple, or completely white, fleshy; lateral sepal subulate (needle-like), minute, usually obscured by dorsal sepal, visible only from the front between the spurs. Petals much smaller than sepal, usually not discernible. Labellum cream or white, forming a curved tube, with the anterior margin sharply and abruptly deflexed under the tip of the galea, as a semicircular papillose lobe; the lobe hiding a median pouch; at the base on either side of the labellum a narrow conical spur projects downwards between the petals and sepal. Fruiting capsule up to 20 mm long, cylindrical to ovoid, erect to suberect, borne on a greatly elongated stem.

SIMILAR TAXA
When in flower this species could not be confused with any other indigenous orchid. The small leaf, and autumn to winter flowering habit are distinctive features, as is this species penchant for growing in deep drifts of leaf litter, usually in dark, very shaded sites. Fruiting material can be confused with Molloybas cryptanthus with which it often grows. However, Molloybas lacks leaves and chlorophyll, and the narrowly cylindrical capsule is 20-30 mm long, purple-flecked and as it is emerges it is bent toward the peduncle (stem), and often matures in a horizontal, rather than erect position.

FLOWERING
May - September

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

FRUITING
November - January

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult - should not be removed from the wild

ETYMOLOGY
 Corybas: Helmet flower
 Cheese manii: Named after Thomas Frederick Cheeseman (1846 - 15 October 1923) who was a New Zealand botanist and naturalist who, in 1906, produced The Manual of the New Zealand Flora.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Considerable research is underway to investigate the validity of the segregate genera split from Corybas R.Br. by Jones et al. (2002). Whilst much of that work has yet to be published, on advice from Australian Orchidologists Peter Weston and Stephen Hopper (pers. comm., July 2011, November 2014), all of the segregate genera recognised for New Zealand by Jones et al. (2002) are returned to Corybas (see also Lyons 2014; Lehnebach 2016).

ATTRIBUTION

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Lehnebach, C. 2016: New combinations and a replacement name for three New Zealand spider orchids (Corybas). The New Zealand Native Orchid Journal 139. 4-5.
CITATION
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MORE INFORMATION