

Corybas cheesemanii

COMMON NAME

helmet orchid, Cheeseman's 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*.



Eastbourne. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe



White form. Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt.
Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe

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 sepals 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 sepals subulate (needle-like), minute, usually obscured by dorsal sepal, visible only from the front between the spurs. Petals much smaller than sepals, 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 sepals. 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 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

cheesemanii: 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

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007: Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: *Flora of New Zealand*. Vol. II. Government Printer, Wellington.

Jones, D.L.; Clements, M.A.; Sharma, I.K.; Mackenzie, A.M.; Molloy, B.P.J. 2002: Nomenclatural notes arising from studies into the Tribe *Diurideae* (Orchidaceae). *The Orchadian* 13: 437-468.

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.

Lyon, S. P. 2014: Molecular systematics, biogeography, and mycorrhizal associations in the Acianthinae (Orchidaceae), with a focus on the genus *Corybas*. PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison. USA.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Corybas cheesemaniae* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/corybas-cheesemaniae/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/corybas-cheesemaniae/>