

Corybas hypogaeus

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Diminutive, terrestrial, fleshy, late winter to early spring flowering perennial forming extensive colonies through vegetative extension. Plants buried within leaf-litter usually only with the leaf exposed. **Leaf** solitary, held well above flower, much veined, veins largely anastomosing with longitudinal dots in the interspaces; distinctly petiolate, petiole 10–15 mm long, white often pinkish, with a sheathing truncate bract at base; lamina membranous, shining, 11.5–18.4 mm diameter, light green above, midrib and marginal spots purple; silvery to purple-silvery below; cordate-reniform to weakly pandurate, trilobed at apex, middle lobe prolonged, acute, acuminate, side margins sinuate with a single notch on both sides near the sub-hastate base, auricles large, distant, blunt-ended. **Peduncle** short, 2.3–4.6 mm long, hyaline, white or pinkish opaque. **Floral bracts** two, unequal, set close to base of flower, smaller bract to the front of the peduncle, minute, linear, obtuse; the larger bract set to the back to the peduncle, ovate-oblong, obtuse. **Flower** solitary, 6.9–9.2 mm diameter. **Dorsal sepal** sub-obovate-spathulate, narrowest at base, rounded and slightly sinuate or subapiculate at apex rather finely veined, arching and closely clasping, green with a purple median line. **Lateral sepals** up to 15 mm long, hyaline or pinkish opaque, linear, acuminate, very narrow-filiform. **Petals** up to 9.2 mm long, hyaline or pinkish opaque, filiform, 9.2 mm long. **Labellum** short, auriculate at base, apex abruptly flared with rounded and incurved margins, basal portion bearing 2–3 deeply cut laciniae, otherwise deeply and jaggedly cut. **Fruit** narrowly ovoid to ellipsoid borne on greatly elongated peduncle arising well above leaf litter.

SIMILAR TAXA

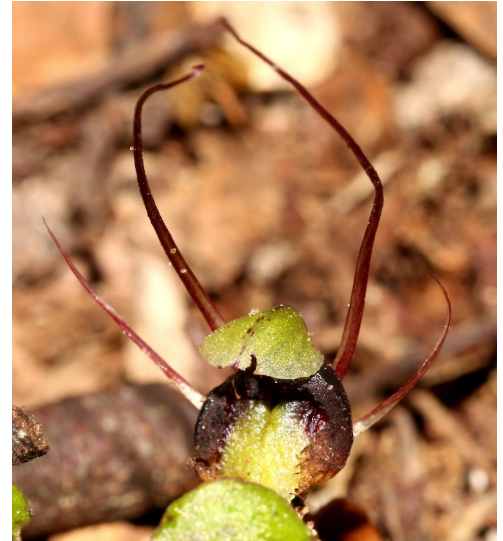
Allied to and distinguished from the rest of the *Corybas trilobus* Hook.f. complex by the tiny flower, which is usually found buried in the leaf litter, and by the distinctly jagged-edged, incurved labellum.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Hunua Range, Waikato and Wairarapa), South Island (North-west Nelson).

HABITAT

Lowland to montane (up to 1000 m a.s.l.). In kānuka (*Kunzea* spp.)- or beech (Nothofagaceae)-dominated forest, and on the margins of swamps developed within such vegetation types. Usually found near the trunks of these trees, semi buried in deep drifts of semi-rotted leaves. The leaf is all that is usually exposed.



Erua Forest Park, Horopito. Photographer: Bill Campbell, Date taken: 23/09/2019, Licence: CC BY.



Erua Forest Park, Horopito. Photographer: Bill Campbell, Date taken: 23/09/2019, Licence: CC BY.

GENUS

Corybas

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Corybas hypogaeus (Colenso) Lehnbach

SYNONYMS

Corysanthes hypogaea Colenso; Nematoceras hypogaeum (Colenso) Molloy, D.L.Jones et M.A.Clem.

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*.

Lehnbach (2016) made three combinations for those *Nematoceras* lacking valid names in *Corybas*. This action enabled the full transfer of *Nematoceras* back to *Corybas*. However, as of writing, a formal publication rejecting the segregation of *Corybas* by Jones et al. (2002) has yet to be published. Lehnbach cites an unpublished PhD (Lyon 2014) that indicates this move is imminent.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August–September

FRUITING

September–December

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult—should not be removed from the wild. Can be grown in basic orchid mix consisting of 2 parts medium coarse sand, ideally clean river sand; 2 parts soil, humus or leaf-mould; 1 part weathered sawdust or rotting wood; 1 part granulated bark. Many *Corybas* thrive when more leaf-mould is added, and the plants grown in 50–70% shade, in the cooler, darker end of the shade-house, in pots kept moist throughout the growing period.

ETYMOLOGY

corybas: Helmet flower

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

CORHYP

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Colenso W. 1884. A further contribution towards making known the botany of New Zealand. *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 16: 325–363.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/TPRSNZ1883-16.2.6.2.25>.

Jones DL, Clements MA, Sharma IK, Mackenzie AM, Molloy BPJ. 2002. Nomenclatural notes arising from studies into the Tribe *Diurideae* (Orchidaceae). *The Orchadian* 13: 437–468.

<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/310769#page/5/mode/1up>.

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 SP. 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.

<https://asset.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/UAXO3VHO6P7EH8Y/R/file-19145.pdf>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description modified from Colenso (1884).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

27 May 2026