

Corybas macranthus

COMMON NAMES

silver-back spider orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, tuberous, spring to summer green perennial forming dense colonies. Plant at flowering 40–100 mm tall. **Leaf** solitary, distinctly petiolate, petiole hyaline to white, more or less fleshy up to 60 mm long, suberect, ascending; lamina firmly fleshy, up to 40 × 40 mm, mostly green flecked or spotted with purple, or dark green above, silvery green to white beneath, orbicular to oblong-oval, apiculate, base rounded. **Floral bract** minute, < ovary, narrowly deltoid, initially closely sheathing spreading at flower anthesis. **Dorsal sepal** mostly shorter than labellum, hyaline yellow-green to greenish-white flecked with crimson or completely wine red, rather long and narrow-lanceolate, acute to shortly acuminate, arching over tubular portion of labellum; lateral sepals dark pink to crimson, filiform, greatly exceeding labellum. **Petals** similar to lateral sepals but usually much shorter. **Labellum** completely dark maroon-black or wine red, or dark maroon-black with a greenish throat, auriculate at base, lamina abruptly deflexed, funnellform, broadly expanded all round, margin minutely denticulate with a median apiculus, inner surface rough with short, sharp, retrorse papillae

SIMILAR TAXA

The stout, fleshy leaf which is usually held up above the flower, and widely flaring trumpet shaped dark maroon-black or wine red labellum, and very narrowly lanceolate dorsal sepal distinguish this species from all except the little known *Corybas papillosus*. *Corybas papillosus* differs from *C. macranthus* mainly by its bicoloured labellum (dark red to purple-red in the upper half, pale pink grading through to whitish in the lower half).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Auckland Islands and Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku.

HABITAT

Lowland to subalpine (up to 1200 m a.s.l.) usually in damp, shaded to well-lit seepages, or in shaded sites under tall forest or associated with rock overhangs (then often in very dry sites). Favouring base-rich substrates such as calcareous mudstones, siltstones, limestones, dolomite or marble; also on basalt and basaltic-andesites, and soils derived from these.



Palliser Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe,
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Palliser Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe,
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GENUS

Corybas

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Corybas macranthus (Hook.f.) Rchb.f.,

SYNONYMS

Corysanthes macrantha (Hook.f.) Hook.f.; Nematoceras macranthum Hook.f.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Segregate genera that were split from *Corybas* R.Br. by Jones et al. (2002) were not universally accepted and further research has been carried out into the genus. On advice from Australian Orchidologists Peter Weston and Stephen Hopper (pers. comm., July 2011, November 2014), NZPCN has returned all of the segregate genera recognised for New Zealand by Jones et al. (2002) to *Corybas* (see also Lyon 2014).

Lehnebach (2016) made three combinations for those *Nematoceras* lacking valid names in *Corybas*. This action now enables 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. Lehnebach cites an unpublished PhD (Lyon 2014) that indicates this move is imminent.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September–January

FRUITING

October–February

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult—should not be removed from the wild. Can be grown in basic orchid mix consists 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.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

corybas: Helmet flower

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to native orchids of New Zealand

NVS CODE

CORMAC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

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.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

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.

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>.

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description adapted from Moore and 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.

MORE INFORMATION

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

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