

Corybas rotundifolius

COMMON NAMES

helmet orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Diminutive orchid forming small colonies of 2–6 plants within deep drifts of leaf litter on poorly drained ground usually under regenerating forest or within gumland scrub. Plants at flowering 15–35 mm tall. **Stem** erect. **Leaf** usually solitary (sometimes paired), 10–25 mm long, blue-green, green to dull green, sessile, broadly ovate, rarely pandurate. **Floral bract** 1, < ovary. **Flower** usually solitary (sometimes 2), conspicuous, aligned over leaf, and raised well above it. **Perianth** 8–10–(18) mm long, horizontal, drooping. **Dorsal sepal** cream to pale-white, spatulate from narrow arching claw, obtuse, hooded, distinctly shorter than labellum (rarely the same length), apex entire. **Lateral sepals and petals** linear 4–5–(8) mm long, white to yellow-white, more or less incurving and appressed to labellum. **Labellum** tubular, margins overlapping, entire, apex usually extending well beyond dorsal sepal; labellum faintly striped 2–6 times for entire length, maroon, otherwise basally blotched dark maroon-red, with the colour extending as a paler broad band toward the apex where it again darkens such that apex is usually dark maroon-red; internal portion of labellum covered in prominent, retrorse, hair-like calli, forming a distinct band from the labellum mouth, along mid-line and nerves, reaching almost to the column.

SIMILAR TAXA

Corybas carsei is similar but smaller. The dorsal sepal in this species is prominently cleft at the apex (hair-lipped). *Corybas carsei* has the labellum usually shorter than the dorsal sepal, while the internal hairlike inward facing labellar calli are more or less prominent and extend along the mid-lines and nerves for about half the labellum length. *Corybas carsei* flowers from late winter to spring (end of August to November (peaking in early October)), and is exclusively known only from restiad bog habitats.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from Te Paki to near the Manawatu Gorge; However, all recent records come from Te Paki south to the Warkworth area with one outlier at Opuatia, near Rangiriri), Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) (discovered 2008), Chatham Islands (Rēkohu / Wharekauri / Chatham Island discovered 2007).



Warkworth. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/07/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Corybas rotundifolius. Photographer: Kevin Matthews, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT

A species frequenting open though often heavily shaded sites overlying seasonally waterlogged soils. It is often found in deep drifts of leaf litter, particularly under kānuka (*Kunzea* spp. or in association with regenerating kauri (*Agathis australis* (D.Don) Lindl.) forest. In parts of Northland it is frequently found in gumland scrub, though usually in shaded sites, often in or along the sides of drains.

THREATS

Uncommon and rather sporadic in its occurrences. However it is a small, winter flowering species, so it is easily overlooked. Some accessible populations have suffered from plant collectors.

GENUS

Corybas

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Corybas rotundifolius (Hook.f.) Rchb.f.

SYNONYMS

Corysanthes matthewsii Cheeseman, *Corysanthes rotundifolia* (Hook.f.) Hook.f., *Nematoceras rotundifolia* Hook.f., the New Zealand plant has also been confused with the Australian *Corybas unguiculatus* (R.Br.) Reichb.f.; *Anzybas rotundifolius* (Hook.f.) 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* (see also Lyon 2014).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(June)–July–(September)

FRUITING

October–November

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild.

ETYMOLOGY

corybas: Helmet flower

rotundifolius: Round leaf; from the Latin rotundus and folium

NVS CODE

CORROT

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: EF, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: EF, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, 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

Jones DL, Clements MA, Sharma IK, Mackenzie AM, Molloy BPJ. 2002. Nomenclatural notes arising from studies into the Tribe *Diurideae* (Orchidaceae). *The Orchadian* 13(10): 437–468.

<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/310769#page/2/mode/1up>.

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)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

27 May 2026