Corybas trilobus

COMMON NAMES
spider orchid

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Terrestrial, tuberous, glabrous, extremely variable winter to summer-green herb forming dense colonies of many plants through vegetative extension. Plant at flowering 20–50 mm tall, flower usually set above leaf but sometimes beneath. **Leaf** distinctly petiolate; petiole 10–24 mm long; lamina membranous 10–30 mm diameter, dark green to green, reniform to orbicular, usually wider than long, and mostly bearing a distinct median apiculate lobe, base broadly cordate. **Floral bract** rarely as long as ovary, linear-lanceolate to lanceolate. **Peduncle** short to long. **Ovary** erect, creamy yellow to yellow-green, ribbed. **Dorsal sepal** short, spathulate, obtuse and concave, rounded to cucullate at broad tip, arched over top of labellum, mostly green with purple flecks, sometimes translucent yellow-green with purple flecks or completely white. **Lateral sepals** long, filiform, greatly exceeding labellum, usually basally red fading through pink to translucent white or completely white. **Petals** similar to lateral sepals in colour and shape, but usually much shorter. **Labellum** colour variable, sometimes deep crimson or maroon, otherwise reddish grading through to translucent with purple or even greenish flecks or stripes,occasionally completely white, auriculate at base, lamina very abruptly deflexed, broad and rounded, margin entire, usually incurled except at the lower edge, inner surface retrorsely papillose. **Seeding peduncle** up to 200 mm tall.

SIMILAR TAXA
Corybas trilobus is a species aggregate that requires critical taxonomic investigation using a wide range of modern techniques. The aggregate is unified by, and distinguished from all other species by the more or less trilobed leaf (in some more distinctly so than in others). Chromosome counts indicate two cytotypes a diploid and a tetraploid, and there is some correlation between these cytoraces and their morphology. The relationship of the subantarctic and Chatham Islands forms to the newly described Macquarie Island endemic *C. sulcatus* need careful evaluation. The above description encompasses several commonly encountered forms. Recently Lehnebach et al. (2016) segregated from *C. trilobus* five new species, even so *C. trilobus* remains variable and probably requires further taxonomic revision.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura.



Otangaroa State Forest. Photographer: Kevin Matthews, Date taken: 03/09/2009, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Otangaroa State Forest. Photographer: Kevin Matthews, Date taken: 03/09/2009, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine (up to 1200 m a.s.l.). Probably the most widely ranging of all the New Zealand species, occupying a diverse array of habitats from coastal dune forest and scrub to subalpine shrublands and mires. More than one species is involved (see under similar species), and any clear habitat distinction at this stage is impractical.

GENUS
Corybas

FAMILY
Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY
Corybas trilobus (Hook.f.) Rchb.f.

SYNONYMS
Nematoceras trilobum Hook.f.

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*.
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.
Recently Lehnebach et al. (2016) segregated five new species from *Corybas trilobus*. However, in the process they did not recircumscribe *C. trilobus* leaving it unclear which of the remaining variants currently accepted within that name match the type. Until this is done a clear understanding of C*orybas trilobus sensu. stricto* is still unavailable.
In October 2016 an article in *Trilepidea* (issue 155, p. 9) by Jeremy Rolfe provides useful characteristics in *Corybas trilobus* agg.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August–October

FRUITING
August–April

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 if 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
CORTRI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 36, 72

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(10)*: 437–468. https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/310769#page/2/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.
Lehnebach CA, Zeller AJ, Frericks J, Ritchie P. 2016. Five new species of *Corybas* (Diurideae, Orchidaceae) endemic to New Zealand and phylogeny of the *Nematoceras* clade. *Phytotaxa 270(1)*: 1–24. https://doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.270.1.1.
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-trilobus/

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