Dendrobium cunninghamii

COMMON NAME
Winika, pekapeka, Christmas orchid, bamboo orchid

SYNONYMS
Winika cunninghamii (Lindl.) M.A.Clem., D.L.Jones et Molloy

FAMILY
Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY
Dendrobium cunninghamii Lindl.

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

NVS CODE
WINCUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 40

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands

HABITAT
Coastal to montane. Mostly epiphytic on forest tree trunks and branches, sometimes on fallen logs, and found as a also rupestral on rocks, cliff faces or banks. Occasionally colonising brick or concrete walls within urban areas.
FEATURES
Epiphytic or rupestral, rhizomatous, perennial forming discrete tufted patches up to 1.5 x 2.0 m. Rhizome suberect to ascending, similar to stems, producing numerous more or less branched roots. Stems cane-like, long persistent, firm, wiry, and mostly slender, thickening towards base, up to 7 mm diameter, yellow-green, bright yellow to orange, glossy with obvious internodes and thickened nodes; unbranched in lower third, otherwise bearing numerous lateral, widely spreading, somewhat drooping branches. Leaf-sheaths tubular, minutely papillose, imbricating, covering younger stems; leaf lamina 30-50 x 3 mm, dark green, green to yellow-green darkened at junction with leaf-sheath, narrow-linear. Inflorescences 1-6-8-flowered, produced several nodes back from the active vegetative apex, usually as short, slender laterals; floral bracts inconspicuous, short, tubular; pedicel very slender, longer than ovary. Perianth 20-25(-30) mm diameter, glabrous, white (rarely cream), lip and column usually rose-pink, purplish to green. Sepals elliptic, spreading, apices more or less reflexed; lateral sepals fused under labellum and attached to column-base. Petals slightly broader. Labellum shorter, distinctly trilobed; lateral lobes small, often highly coloured, inclined to stand parallel to one another; mid-lobe white, broad, subacute, minutely crenulate; disc with 4-5 pale-coloured, low, longitudinal ridges terminating just above short claw and near to a colourful knob-like nectary situated at the end of the column-foot. Column about as long as its foot, cylindric, very narrowly winged. Capsules initially green, ovoid, maturing greyish-white, often striped with maroon or purple.

SIMILAR TAXA
None. This species is easily recognised by its bright yellow to orange cane-like stems, tufted growth habit and spectacular, large white and usually rose-pink or purple flowers.

FLOWERING
December - June

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White

FRUITING
January - August

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown in a hanging basket in standard orchid mix. Often can be strapped to a tree trunk and provided it is kept moist during the drier months it grows readily. This species does best in semi-shade. Should not be removed from the wild.

ETYMOLOGY
dendrobium: From the Greek dendron ‘tree’ and bios ‘life’, alluding to the wild plants being epiphytic on trees
cunninghamii: Named after Allan Cunningham (1791 – 1839) who was an English botanist and explorer, primarily known for his travels to Australia (New South Wales) and New Zealand to collect plants. Author of Florae Insularum Novae Zelandiae Precursor, 1837-40 (Introduction to the flora of New Zealand).

WHERE TO BUY
Occasionally available from specialist native plant nurseries

TAXONOMIC NOTES
The generic distinction of Winika from Dendrobium was always considered by many orchidologists dubious (M. Chase pers. comm. 2000), in part because little comparative data had been published to support the new monotypic genus (see Clements et al. 1997). Recently there has been much investigation into the validity of splitting the Australian Dendrobium into numerous segregate genera and some of those studies have included samples of Winika (Adams 2011; Burke et al. 2008). Garnock-Jones (2014) in reviewing these (and other) papers has questioned the continued recognition of Winika as distinct by New Zealand botanists, especially as outside New Zealand no one else is accepting it. Therefore, the traditional broad circumscription of Dendrobium is here favoured over the narrow, and Winika is treated as a synonym of Dendrobium.

ATTRIBUTION
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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

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