

Prasophyllum elegantissimum

COMMON NAMES

manawa wairepo, elegant leek orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

INTERIM CONSERVATION STATUS

2025 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, Sp | Interim | Lehnebach et al. (2025)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow, Brown

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, glabrescent, rather fleshy, perennial herb. Plant at flowering 16–60 cm tall. **Stem** erect and fleshy. **Leaf** 14–50 × 0.3–0.5 cm sheathing, terete, apex acute, often overtopping raceme, distal end withered when flowering. **Raceme** 5–12 cm, with 8–20 flowers. **Floral bracts** ovate, apex acuminate, 2–5 × 1.3–1.5 mm; rarely most-basal bract oblong and 7 × 3 mm. **Ovary** obovate, green-maroon, 5–10.5 × 2–4 mm. **Perianth** green-maroon. **Dorsal sepal** recurved, ovate, apiculate, 4–6.5 × 2–2.5 mm. **Lateral sepals** 5–6 × 1.2–1.5 mm, green, connate at the base, lanceolate, involute and fleshy near distal end, apex acute. **Petals** 4–6 × 1.2–1.6 mm, green-maroon, linear-oblong, apex obtuse to acuminate. **Labellum** 3 × 2 mm, green-maroon, ovate, margin entire, smooth to undulate, apex strongly recurved, proximal end forming a nectary pit followed by a thickened green callus that runs along the centre of the labellum from the pit edge to near the apex. **Column wings** bilobed, the longest lobe slightly shorter or longer than the anther.

SIMILAR TAXA

Prasophyllum colensoi is very similar in height, structure and colour. *P. elegantissimum* has an overall more elegant, fine featured looking flower. The best feature to easily distinguish the species is the dorsal sepal, in *P. colensoi* the tip is acute, compared to the apiculate tip seen in *P. elegantissimum*.

Prasophyllum hectorii is generally a taller plant, up to 1 metre. The labellum margin of *P. hectorii* is notably undulose, compared to the slight wavy labellum margins of *P. elegantissimum* and *P. colensoi* (generally towards the tip only). *P. hectorii* prefers to grow partially submerged in (acidic wetlands) water.

DISTRIBUTION

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

HABITAT

Lowland to sub-alpine wetlands or damp areas.



Waingawa River valley, Tararua Range.
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Waingawa River valley, Tararua Range.
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THREATS

Wetland modification and destruction by anthropocentric means. Lehnebach et al. (2025) proposed a threat status of 'Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable (NVu3i) with the qualifiers DPS (Data Poor Size), DPT (Data Poor Trend), Sp (Biologically Sparse)' using Rolfe et al. (2022). They estimated that the population occupies an area of 10–100 ha and is expected to continue to decline 10–30% over the next 10 years because of continuing pressures on its wetland habitats.

GENUS

Prasophyllum

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Prasophyllum elegantissimum Lehnebach

TAXONOMIC NOTES

This species was noted as *Prasophyllum* "B" by Irwin (2001). Another entity was suggested to exist, however the Lehnebach (2025) study dismisses that after examining the DNA of specimens and the morphology of live plants, electronic and herbarium specimens.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December–February

FRUITING

January–April

ETYMOLOGY

prasophyllum: From the Greek 'prasos' leek and phyllos 'leaf'

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange PJ, Gosden J, Courtney SP, Fergus AJ, Barkla JW, Beadel SM, Champion PD, Hindmarsh-Walls R, Makan T, Michel P. 2024. Conservation status of vascular plants in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023. Wellington: Department of Conservation. 105 p.

Irwin B. 2001. Making identifications more difficult. *New Zealand Native Orchid Group Journal* 79: 8–11.

Lehnebach CA, Alderton-Moss J., Shepherd LD. 2025. A new species of *Prasophyllum* (Orchidaceae) for New Zealand and lectotypification of *P. colensoi*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 1–23.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.2025.2454582>.

Rolfe J, Hitchmough R, Michel P, Makan T, Cooper JA, de Lange PJ, Townsend CAJ, Miskelly CM, Molloy J. 2022. New Zealand threat classification system manual 2022. Part 1: assessments. Wellington: Department of Conservation. 45 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by Matt Ward, description provided by Carlos Lehnebach—subsequently published in Lehnebach et. al. (2025).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/prasophyllum-elegantissimum/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026