Pterostylis nutans

COMMON NAMES
nodding greenhood orchid

BIOSTATUS
Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant | Qualifiers: SO
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS
Brown, Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Terrestrial orchid forming colonies. Plants up to 300 mm tall. **Stem internodes** equal to or much larger than bracts. **Rosette leaves** 5–10 or more; petiole conspicuous, narrowly winged; leaf lamina 15–30 × 10–20 mm, light green to dark green, oblong-ovate, acute to subacute, margins unuldating or finely crenate. **Cauline leaves** 1–3, sheathing, bract-like. **Flower** solitary, usually close to but sometimes remote from subtending bract; top of stem and ovary strongly arched over so that flower faces downwards or even incurves toward stem. **Dorsal sepal** 25 mm tall, rounded, apex acute. **Lateral sepals** very shortly connate, diverging at narrow angle, apices acuminate and hardly overtopping galea, surface minutely rugulose. **Petals** more or less equal to dorsal sepal, acute. **Labellum** irritable, narrow-triangular, strongly arched, protruding, apex subacute, margins slight incurved, finely covered in bristly hairs. **Column** much shorter than labellum; stigma elliptic.



From H.B. Matthews collection. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Licence: All rights reserved.

SIMILAR TAXA
A very distinctive species whose large nodding flowers immediately distinguish it from any other indigenous species. The narrowly-petiolate, oblong-ovate rosette leaves with undulating, crenate margins are also unique to this species.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand; North Island (recorded three times, originally from Pukemiro Hill near Kaitaia (between 1914 and 1920), from Castor Bay, Whangaparaoa Peninsula (1942) and most recently from Waihaha, Hauhangaroa Range in 1995). Also Australia (eastern).

HABITAT
In New Zealand this species has been found growing in coastal shrublands, open clay ground and in dense podocarp forest on the margin of a walking track. In Australia is it widespread in a variety of early successional to climax community habitats.

THREATS
Both Kaitaia and Castor Bay populations were probably wiped out by botanists (certainly the Kaitaia population was collected from repeatedly until there were no plants left). However, this species is insect-pollinated, and the insect vectors responsible for successful pollination are not present in New Zealand. It is for this reason that it is listed as a vagrant, for without human intervention it would be unlikely to form and set viable seed.

GENUS
Pterostylis

FAMILY
Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY
Pterostylis nutans R.Br.

SYNONYMS
Pterostylis matthewsii Cheeseman

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
July–October

FRUITING
September–February

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
This species is easily cutlivated. Indeed plants of Australian origin are held by several orchid specialists in the country. Although it requires a specific insect pollination vector, it can be hand pollinated and it also spreads asexually through natural division of its tubers. Because of its wide cultivation in many parts of the country reports of wild occurrences need to be critically examined as people have been known to deliberately plant this species into the wild in the mistaken belief that they are helping save it from extinction.

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available

ETYMOLOGY
pterostylis: Winged column
nutans: Drooping

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to native orchids of New Zealand

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant | Qualifiers: SO
2012 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant | Qualifiers: SO
2009 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant | Qualifiers: SO
2004 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Extirpated | Qualifiers: EW, SO Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Northland: 2026 | Regionally Extirpated | Qualifiers: OL Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Northland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Northland | Taitokerau" Ford et al. 2026 report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
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/pterostylis-nutans/

PDF DATE

25 August 2026