

# Thelymitra colensoi

## COMMON NAME

Colenso's sun orchid

## SYNONYMS

*Thelymitra intermedia* Berggr.

## FAMILY

Orchidaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Thelymitra colensoi* Hook.f.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

## NVS CODE

THECOL

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Data Deficient

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Data Deficient

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura. Rather widespread and very common in northern New Zealand. Often on offshore islands.

## HABITAT

Coastal to montane (up to 700 m a.s.l.). Usually in open ground, or on clay pans. Frequent in successional shrublands and open forest. Common in pine plantations. Together with members of the *T. longifolia* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst. agg, this is the most commonly encountered sun orchid on northern offshore islands. Frequently found growing with *T. pauciflora* R.Br.



Oratia Valley, Waitakere. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 01/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Rust fungus commonly destroys the leaf. Oratia Valley, Waitakere Range. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 01/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, tuberous, glabrous late winter to summer-green perennial herb. **Leaf** solitary, erect, to suberect, or trailing on ground, fleshy, deeply channelled and keeled, prominently v-shaped in cross section, 80–300 × 3–6–(8) mm, dark or light green base, linear-lanceolate to lanceolate, apex acute, margins and upper and lower surfaces often spotted with rust, closely sheathing at base. **Inflorescence** racemose, 80–300 × 1–1.5–(2.5) mm, slender, straight, wiry, dark green, reddish green or yellow-green. **Bracts** 1–2–(3), 10–30 × 3–4 mm, linear to linear-lanceolate, closely sheathing, acute to acuminate, dark green or reddish green. **Flowers** 1–7, 10–15 mm diameter, pale blue, mauve to pink; only opening on very hot, still, sunny days, autogamous. **Perianth segments** 6–8 × 3–5 mm, concave, shortly apiculate; **dorsal sepal** lanceolate to ovate, obtuse to subacute; **lateral sepals** lanceolate to ovate, acute; **petals** broadly lanceolate to ovate, subacute; labellum elliptic to lanceolate, acute, slightly smaller than other segments. **Column** 3.5–4.2 × 2.0–2.5 mm, erect, pale blue to mauve; post-anther lobe slightly cucullate and curved, usually dark brown to reddish-brown or red, apex bluntly entire, bright yellow; post-anther lobe extension minute; auxillary lobes absent; column arms converging, 0.5–0.8 mm long, bent sharply upwards near the middle at 90 degrees, each furnished with a subterminal tuft of sparse white cilia. **Anther** inserted above central column. **Stigma** situated at base of column.

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to native orchids of New Zealand

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Thelymitra colensoi* is rather similar to and often confused with *T. pauciflora* R.Br.. However, *T. colensoi*, is an endemic species which is much smaller and more slender, with fewer flowers (up to 5), which almost never open, and then only one at a time. The flowers are certainly autogamous and probably also cleistogamous. The petals are pale blue to pale pink. The post-anther lobe is not as thin or as deeply inturned as *T. pauciflora*, pale blue to pink, grading through brown to reddish-brown with a pale yellow to yellow margin. The post-anther lobe is rather similar to that of *T. longifolia* G.Forst. though much more deeply cleft. *Thelymitra colensoi* is often known in New Zealand by its later synonym *T. intermedia* Berggren.

## FLOWERING

July–December

## FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

## FRUITING

September–March

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very easily grown in a sunny, well drained site. Often naturalises in gardens within urban areas abutting indigenous vegetation in northern New Zealand. This species is a common contaminant of pine bark and is often found growing within inner city traffic islands and planter boxes in which pine bark mulch has been strewn. Although easily cultivated, like all orchids it should not be removed from the wild.

## ETYMOLOGY

**thelymitra**: Woman's hat

**colensoi**: Named after William Colenso (7 November 1811 - 10 February 1899) who was a Cornish Christian missionary to New Zealand, and also a printer, botanist, explorer and politician.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description subsequently published in Rolfe & de Lange (2010).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Rolfe JR, de Lange PJ. 2010. Illustrated guide to New Zealand sun orchids, *Thelymitra* (Orchidaceae). Jeremy Rolfe, Wellington, NZ. 57 p.

### **NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION**

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### **MORE INFORMATION**

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/thelymitra-colensoi/>