

# Thelymitra cyanea

## COMMON NAMES

swamp sun orchid, striped sun orchid

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

## FLOWER COLOURS

Blue, Violet/Purple

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, tuberous, glabrous, spring to summer-green perennial herb, growing in colonies of 4–20 plants arising through vegetative extension. Plants at flower up to 800 mm tall. **Leaf** solitary, erect, to suberect, very fleshy to subcoriaceous, longitudinally ribbed, deeply channelled and keeled with margins thickly rounded (appearing trilobed in cross-section), 50–300 × 10–18 mm, green to yellow-green, linear-lanceolate, base closely sheathing. **Flowering stem** stiffly erect, rather wiry, green to yellow-green. **Bracts** 1–2–(3), foliaceous, closely-sheathing, fleshy, of similar colour to stem and leaf. **Raceme** bearing 1–6 flowers. **Flowers** 10–20 mm diameter, usually blue with darker blue or purple stripes on the petals, dorsal and lateral sepals (very rarely also on labellum); otherwise white with green or pale blue stripes or pink with brown stripes; segments widely spreading, **dorsal and lateral sepals** slightly narrower and longer than petals. **Petals** broadly elliptic. **Labellum** broadly obovate, often slightly crenate, or undulose, apex often mucronate. **Column** short up to 6 mm long, erect, white, post anther lobe greatly reduced (appearing as if absent) bearing a small area of blister-like crowded calli; column arms yellow more or less erect, ribbon-like, flattened, and twisted inwards one to one-and-a-half times in a loose spiral, apex unevenly lobed without cilia. **Anther** bent forward, well exposed, apex bifid (appearing as two short horns).

## SIMILAR TAXA

Most likely to be confused with *Thelymitra pulchella* Hook.f., a rather variable species which may grow in similar habits, especially in the far north of the North Island and on the Chatham Islands. *Thelymitra cyanea* is well marked by the usually distinctly darker blue striped flowers, obviously larger, wider, blunt ended and often wavy labellum, absence of a post anther lobe, and whose column arms are yellow, flattened, ribbon-like, mostly spirally twisted and inturned, lack cilia and have unequally bifid apices. The anther is usually fully exposed and the apex distinctly bifid. *Thelymitra pulchella* is extremely variable but its column arms are much more prominent, mostly toothed, adorned with yellow fimbriae or ciliate. *Thelymitra pulchella* is a species derived from past hybridisation between *T. cyanea* and *T. longifolia* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst.



Tararua Forest Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 29/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Tararua Forest Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/12/2008, Licence: CC BY.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Auckland Islands. Also Australia.

## HABITAT

Coastal to montane (up to 800 m a.s.l.) mostly in acidic, often restiad-dominated peat bogs. Also found in damp ground within gumland scrub. This species responds well to frequent disturbance and burning but is able to tolerate dense restiad vegetation and so is often the last sun orchid to persist in dense *Sporadanthus* F.Muell-dominated vegetation.

## GENUS

Thelymitra

## FAMILY

Orchidaceae

## AUTHORITY

Thelymitra cyanea (Lindl.) Benth.

## SYNONYMS

Macdonaldia cyanea Lindl., Thelymitra venosa sensu Cheeseman nom. inv., Thelymitra uniflora Hook.f.

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

October–March

## FRUITING

December–June

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown if kept in a pot partially submerged in water. However, as with all orchids it should not be removed from the wild.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

## ETYMOLOGY

**thelymitra**: Woman's hat

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to native orchids of New Zealand](#)

## NVS CODE

THECYA

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, SO [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

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

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

## ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).

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## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026