

# *Thelymitra ixioides*

## COMMON NAMES

spotted sun orchid

## BIOSTATUS

Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: S?O, Sp

[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, either solitary or in small colonies of 2–4 plants. Plant at flower up to 700 mm tall. **Leaf** solitary, fleshy, deeply channelled and more or less longitudinally ribbed, 50–120 mm long, reddish-green to almost silvery reddish-green near base otherwise yellow-green to dark green, linear-lanceolate, base closely sheathing, undersides finely rugose. **Flowering stem** stiffly erect, wiry, reddish green to silvery-green. **Bracts** 1–2–(3), foliaceous, closely-sheathing, fleshy, bases dark reddish-green to silvery reddish-green otherwise green to yellow-green. **Raceme** bearing (1)–5–(20) flowers (usually much fewer). **Flowers** 11–18 mm diameter, blue, segments widely spreading, dorsal sepal and petals with darker blue or purple spots. **Sepals and petals** very broad. **Labellum** distinctly rounded. **Column** up to 5 mm long, erect, bluish grading to dark purple near apex; column arms flattened, cilia white, largely marginal, column arms projecting from anterior margin of the side lobule, cilia white or mauve; post anther lobe slightly taller than anther, erect, not cucullate, the back and apex bearing numerous violet or yellow finger-like calli (the tallest yellow or orange); side lobules distinct, usually taller, yellow, margins mostly lacinate.

## SIMILAR TAXA

The reddish-green to silvery reddish-green, deeply ribbed leaves with finely rugose undersides, and distinctive blue flowers with darker blue or purple spots on the dorsal sepal and petals, and the non hooded, post anther lobe bearing conspicuous yellow or orange finger like calli immediately separate this species from any other *Thelymitra* in New Zealand. New Zealand plants are self pollinating and Australian plants insect-pollinated.

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island, South Island. Also Australia.



Pinehaven, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/11/2008, Licence: CC BY.



Pinehaven, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/11/2008, Licence: CC BY.

## HABITAT

Coastal to montane (up to 900 m a.s.l.). In open ground, especially clay pans within gumland scrub but also colonising roadside banks, road gravel, stable dune slacks, and well-lit but sparsely vegetated ground under taller scrub and forest. Sometimes in beech (*Nothofagaceae*) forest or on the margins of montane streams. Rarely in peat bogs.

## THREATS

No apparent threats but not common. This species rarely occurs in any abundance at any particular site and is very vulnerable to roadworks, animal browse, loss through succession to taller forest and because it has attractive flowers that make it a target of plant collectors.

## GENUS

*Thelymitra*

## FAMILY

Orchidaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Thelymitra ixioides* Sw.

## SYNONYMS

*Thelymitra ixioides* var. *typica* Hatch, *Thelymitra juncifolia* Lindl., *Thelymitra lilacina* F.Muel. ex Lindl., *Thelymitra iridioides* Seib. ex Benth.

## TAXONOMIC NOTES

New Zealand plants differ from those in Australian (from where it was first described by their autogamous rather than entomophilous reproductive biology). For this reason New Zealand plants are usually regarded as an unnamed entity allied to *T. ixioides*. Research into the taxonomic status of the New Zealand plant is in progress.

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

September–December

## FRUITING

November–March

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult—should not be removed from the wild.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

## ETYMOLOGY

**thelymitra**: Woman's hat

**ixioides**: Like an ixia

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

## NVS CODE

THEIXI

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: S?O, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, EF 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.

## 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-ixioides/>

## PDF DATE

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