# Thelymitra longifolia

## COMMON NAMES
white sun orchid, māikuku

## BIOSTATUS
Native

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

## CATEGORY
Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

## FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White



Kaitoke Regional Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.




Pink-flowered form. Days Bay, Eastbourne. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 19/11/2016, Licence: CC BY.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Terrestrial, tuberous, glabrous, spring to summer-green perennial herb, either solitary or in dense colonies of 4–20 plants arising through vegetative extension. Plant at flower up to 1 m tall (usually much less). **Leaf** solitary, erect, suberect or trailing the ground, very fleshy to subcoriaceous, deeply to weakly channelled and prominently ribbed longitudinally, 50–380 × 10–40 mm, green, dark green, reddish-green, reddish brown or yellow-green, lanceolate to linear-lanceolate, base closely sheathing, margins, surface and apex often disfigured by black spots and sometimes by prominent dark orange-brown rust pustules. **Flowering stem** stiffly erect, rather wiry, green, reddish green to brownish green. **Bracts** 1–2–(3), foliaceous, closely-sheathing, fleshy, of similar colour to stem and leaf. **Raceme** bearing (1)–5–(20) scented or unscented flowers. **Flowers** 8–18 mm diameter, externally red-green to dark green, internally white or very pale pink, segments spreading, widely spreading or scarcely opening. **Dorsal sepal** slightly broader than lateral sepals. **Petals and labellum** alike, narrowly ovate, subacute. **Column** up to 8 mm long, erect, basally brown or white grading to dark brown to almost black toward apex; column arms terete, mostly bent inwards such that they are lying more or less under post-anther lobe; cilia abundant, floccose (like cotton) or coarsely ciliate, white or cream, short and crowded in globose masses; post anther lobe overtopping anther, dark and smooth above middle, and usually yellowish on the semi-circular cucullate apex.

## SIMILAR TAXA
Most likely to be confused with *Thelymitra colensoi* Hook.f. and *T. pauciflora* R.Br., from both of which it differs by its usually white, sometimes pale pink flowers. From *T. pauciflora* it is readily separated by the broad, undivided, hooded column which usually completely encloses the cilia of the column arms. Smaller forms are separated from *T. colensoi* by their white flowers and broader, taller column which completely encloses the cilia of the column arms.

## DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands, Auckland Islands. Also on Norfolk Island.

## HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine (up to 1200 m a.s.l.). Occupying a wide range of habitats from open ultramafic talus to dense forest. However, it is most common in shrublands. This species is extremely variable and it is likely that following taxonomic revision, a number of forms, some with distinct ecologies, may be formally segregated.

## GENUS
Thelymitra

## FAMILY
Orchidaceae

## AUTHORITY
Thelymitra longifolia J.R.Forst. et G.Forst.

## SYNONYMS
Thelymitra alba Colenso, Thelymitra nemoralis Colenso, Thelymitra angustifolia Hook.f., Thelymitra aristata sensu Hatch nom. inv., Thelymitra forsteri Sw., Thelymitra grandis F.Muel. ex Benth., Thelymitra longifolia var. alba (Colenso) Cheeseman, Thelymitra longifolia var. forsteri (Sw.) Hatch, Thelymitra purpureo-fusca Colenso

## TAXONOMIC NOTES
At least three forms of *T. longifolia* are included here. One is usually associated with montane beech (Nothofagaceae) forests. This is a small slender plant, which has a linear-lanceolate yellow-green leaf and usually a single, scarcely opening, self-pollinating white flower. Another is a widespread variable plant with numerous flowers, which are unscented, and mostly only open on hot, still, sunny days. This form has column arm cilia that are distinctly floccose (like cotton wool). It is self pollinating and matches the type. The last form has numerous scented flowers, which open in sunny or cloudy weather, and coarse column arm cilia. This form is insect pollinated.

## ENDEMIC TAXON
No

## ENDEMIC GENUS
No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

## FLOWERING
September–February

## FRUITING
October–April

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Moderately easy to grow. Does well in a pot. Should not be removed from the wild. This species often naturalises into gardens adjoining indigenous vegetation. It is sometimes seen as a pot contaminant of commerical plant lines.

## ETYMOLOGY
**thelymitra**: Woman's hat
**longifolia**: Long leaf

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

## NVS CODE
THELON

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 26

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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

de Lange P, Rolfe J, St George I, Sawyer J. 2007. Wild orchids of the lower North Island. Department of Conservation, Wellington, NZ. 194 p.
Rolfe JR, de Lange PJ. 2010. Illustrated guide to New Zealand sun orchids, *Thelymitra* (Orchidaceae). Jeremy Rolfe, Wellington, NZ. 57 p.

## ATTRIBUTION

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

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Thelymitra longifolia Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/thelymitra-longifolia/ (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/thelymitra-longifolia/

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026