Thelymitra malvina

COMMON NAMES
mauve sun orchid

BIOSTATUS
Native

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS
Blue, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Glabrous, terrestrial orchid. **Tubers** ovoid 10–30 × 5–12 mm, fleshy, pinkish-grey. **Leaf** linear to linear-lanceolate, 100–350 × 5–20 mm, light to dark green with a purple base, erect, canaliculate, fleshy, abaxial surface ribbed, sheathing at base, apex acute. **Inflorescence** 0.25–0.75–(0.9) m tall, 1.5–5.0 mm diameter, stout, fleshy, straight, green to purple-green. **Sterile bracts** (2)–3, linear to linear-lanceolate, 20–100 × 4–11 mm, closely sheathing, acute to acuminate, green or purple-green, upper bract usually free with base usually only half encircling the scape. **Fertile bracts** 8–30 × 3–6 mm, green or purple-green, ovate-acuminate to obovate-acuminate, sheathing the pedicels. **Pedicels** 5–15 mm long, slender. **Ovary** cylindrical to narrow-obovoid, 5–12 × 2–4 mm. **Flowers** 3–25, 18–32 mm diameter, slate blue to mauve inside, sepals greenish outside, opening readily in warm weather. **Perianth segments** 8–16 × 3–7 mm, concave, acute, shortly apiculate; **dorsal sepal** elliptic to lanceolate; **lateral sepals** elliptic to lanceolate, asymmetric; **petals** ovate to lanceolate; **labellum** elliptic to linear-lanceolate, often narrower than other segments. **Column** erect, 6–7.5 × 2.5–3.7 mm, mauve; post-anther lobe cucullate, 2–4 × 1.5–2.5 mm, tubular, inflated, compressed dorsally, curved gently, dark reddish brown, apex shallowly bilobed, lobes toothed, orifice small, yellow; post-anther lobe extension 0.6–0.2 mm; auxiliary lobes absent; lateral lobes converging 1–1.5 mm long, digitiform, obliquely erect, each with a more or less terminal, dense, broom of mauve or pink cilia 1–1.5 mm long. **Anther** inserted near middle of column, ovoid, 2.5–3.5 × 1.2–2.2 mm, the connective prolonged into a 0.5–1.0 mm long beak. **Stigma** at base of column, 1.8–2.6 × 1.5–2.5 mm, ovate-quadrate. **Capsules** 12–20 × 4–6 mm, obovoid, erect, ribbed.

Lake Ohia. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 30/10/2008, Licence: CC BY.

Kaimaumau 5/11/95, column only. Photographer: Eric Scanlen, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Thelymitra malvina has no close relatives in New Zealand. The tall stout but slender scape and mauve to slate blue flowers with mauve to pink mop-like cilia tufts on the lateral lobes are very distinctive. In New Zealand, *Thelymitra malvina* usually has > 5 flowers per scape and these characteristically all open at the same time. Its nearest relative is the Australian endemic *T. atronitida* Jeanes from which it differs by the usually three rather than two sterile bracts, larger mostly insect-pollinated rather than autogamous flowers, dark reddish brown rather than glossy black post anther lobes, and mauve or pink rather than white lateral lobe cilia.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island (known locally from the North Cape area, Ahipara Gumfields, Kaimaumau and Lake Ohia wetlands near Kaitaia and from Ngawha Springs near Kaikohe). Also Australia (common in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia).

HABITAT
Open ground within peat bogs and wetlands, nearly always found in association with rotting kauri (*Agathis australis* (D.Don) Lindl.) logs.

THREATS
Plant collectors are a constant problem because it is a conspicuous orchid with very attractive flowers. It is threatened at many sites by invasive weeds, changes to the local water table, and removal of swamp kauri logs for furniture making. However, it is also reasonably secure at several sites and indications are that it actively spreading in suitable habitats throughout Northland

GENUS
Thelymitra

FAMILY
Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY
Thelymitra malvina M.A.Clem., D.L.Jones et Molloy

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
(September)–October–(November)

FRUITING
October–January

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Not in cultivation. A strongly mycorrhizal species which 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).

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available

ETYMOLOGY
thelymitra: Woman's hat

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

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 26

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: EF, SO
2012 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: EF, SO
2009 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO
2004 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Jeanes J. 2004. A revision of the *Thelymitra pauciflora* R.Br. (Orchidaceae) complex in Australia. *Muelleria 19*: 19–79. https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/59426325#page/21/mode/1up.
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 Rolfe & de Lange (2010). See also Jeanes (2004).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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27 May 2026