

Townsonia deflexa

SYNONYMS

Townsonia viridis sensu Schltr. nom. inv., New Zealand plants had been referred to *Acianthus viridis* Hook.f. which is now regarded as an Australian endemic *Townsonia viridis* (Hook.f.) Schltr.

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Townsonia deflexa Cheeseman

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

NVS CODE

TOWDEF

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North, South, Stewart, Auckland and Campbell Islands

HABITAT

Lowland to upper montane and subalpine habitats (confined to upper montane and subalpine in northern part of range). A small, easily overlooked orchid favouring mossy logs and deep moss patches where it forms small diffuse colonies. It is often (though not exclusively, e.g., Stewart Island) associated with *Nothofagus* Blume forests.



Plant shows a sterile leaf. Photographer: Eric Scanlen



Solitary flower. Photographer: Eric Scanlen

FEATURES

Dark green to bright green slender 50-150 mm orchid, spreading through mossy patches and leaf litter usually in forest. Stem erect, very slender almost translucent. Cauline leaf confined to flowering plants, this 10 mm long, green, orbicular to oblong, apiculate, sessile, usually positioned at mid section of stem. Leaf of sterile and flowering plants, distinctly petiolate, arising from horizontal rhizomes near to or remote from flowering stems; lamina 10 mm long, orbicular to broadly ovate, obtuse to apiculate, rounded or subcordate at base, margin more or less finely crenate. Inflorescence a 10-20 mm long raceme; 1-4-flowered. Floral bracts small, membranous, translucent. Perianth 5 mm long, horizontal and deflexed, greenish. Sepals with thick rounded keels and more or less involute margins; dorsal sepal broad, subacute; lateral sepals slightly longer, minutely cucullate. Petals very much shorter, oblong, erect. Labellum shorter than sepals, broad-ovate, partly embracing column; apex more or less obtuse, recurved; proximal part concave, marked by median triangular thickening and 2 low longitudinal ridges of basal calli. Column shorter than labellum; wings broad throughout, sharply truncate or almost toothed above. Anther partly hidden behind very prominent stigma.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinctive species which is very unlikely to be confused with any other New Zealand orchid species. It is perhaps most similar in flower shape and general structure to *Acianthus sinclairii* Hook.f. but that species has a single, sessile, ovate, acuminate, green leaf with strongly cordate bases (hence its vernacular: heart-leaved orchid) and the larger flowers have sepals ending in solid tail-like appendages (cauda), and an unwinged column. The flowers of *Acianthus sinclairii* tend to be more red-green, with a larger hooded somewhat translucent, red-spotted dorsal sepal, and larger green, red-rimmed labellum, in contrast to the relatively inconspicuous, fairly uniformly bright green somewhat hyaline translucent flowers of *Townsonia deflexa* (note that the basal portion of the labellum in *Townsonia* is often blotched maroon).

FLOWERING

November - February

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Red/Pink

FRUITING

December - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult - should not be removed from the wild.

THREATS

An apparently naturally uncommon, biologically sparse species that does not seem to have ever been subject to any significant decline. However, some of its northern South Island, West Coast habitats are threatened by coal mining.

ETYMOLOGY

deflexa: Bent sharply downwards

Where To Buy

Not commercially available

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Townsonia has had a vexed history being variously treated as *Acianthus viridis*, *Townsonia viridis* or the New Zealand endemic *T. deflexa*. Based on a mostly unpublished molecular (nrITS based study) and limited chromosomal evidence *Townsonia* was reinstated as a genus distinct from *Acianthus* (B.P.J. Molloy *pers. comm.*) and a recent as yet unpublished (now in press) study of the Australian and New Zealand Orchidaceae has upheld this (P. Weston *pers. comm.* November 2014). However, further work is needed to determine whether *T. deflexa* is truly distinct from the Tasmanian *T. viridis* - for now it is accepted as such.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007: Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. II. Government Printer, Wellington.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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(Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/townsonia-deflexa/>