

Corybas rotundifolius

COMMON NAMES

helmet orchid

SYNONYMS

Corysanthes matthewsii Cheeseman, *Corysanthes rotundifolia* (Hook.f.) Hook.f., *Nematoceras rotundifolia* Hook.f., the New Zealand plant has also been confused with the Australian *Corybas unguiculatus* (R.Br.) Reichb.f.; *Anzybas rotundifolius* (Hook.f.) D.L.Jones et M.A.Clem.

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Corybas rotundifolius (Hook.f.) Rchb.f.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

NVS CODE

ANZROT

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: EF, Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: EF, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (from Te Pahi to near the Manawatu Gorge; However, all recent records come from Te Pahi south to the Warkworth area with one outlier at Opuatia, near Rangiriri), Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) (discovered 2008), Chatham Islands (Rēkohu / Wharekauri / Chatham Island discovered 2007).

HABITAT

A species frequenting open though often heavily shaded sites overlying seasonally waterlogged soils. It is often found in deep drifts of leaf litter, particularly under kānuka (*Kunzea* spp. or in association with regenerating kauri (*Agathis australis* (D.Don) Lindl.) forest. In parts of Northland it is frequently found in gumland scrub, though usually in shaded sites, often in or along the sides of drains.



Warkworth. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/07/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Corybas rotundifolius. Photographer: Kevin Matthews, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Diminutive orchid forming small colonies of 2–6 plants within deep drifts of leaf litter on poorly drained ground usually under regenerating forest or within gumland scrub. Plants at flowering 15–35 mm tall. **Stem** erect. **Leaf** usually solitary (sometimes paired), 10–25 mm long, blue-green, green to dull green, sessile, broadly ovate, rarely pandurate. **Floral bract** 1, < ovary. **Flower** usually solitary (sometimes 2), conspicuous, aligned over leaf, and raised well above it. **Perianth** 8–10–(18) mm long, horizontal, drooping. **Dorsal sepal** cream to pale-white, spathulate from narrow arching claw, obtuse, hooded, distinctly shorter than labellum (rarely the same length), apex entire. **Lateral sepals and petals** linear 4–5–(8) mm long, white to yellow-white, more or less incurving and appressed to labellum. **Labellum** tubular, margins overlapping, entire, apex usually extending well beyond dorsal sepal; labellum faintly striped 2–6 times for entire length, maroon, otherwise basally blotched dark maroon-red, with the colour extending as a paler broad band toward the apex where it again darkens such that apex is usually dark maroon-red; internal portion of labellum covered in prominent, retrorse, hair-like calli, forming a distinct band from the labellum mouth, along mid-line and nerves, reaching almost to the column.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

SIMILAR TAXA

Corybas carsei is similar but smaller. The dorsal sepal in this species is prominently cleft at the apex (hair-lipped). *Corybas carsei* has the labellum usually shorter than the dorsal sepal, while the internal hairlike inward facing labellar calli are more less prominent and extend along the mid-lines and nerves for about half the labellum length. *Corybas carsei* flowers from late winter to spring (end of August to November (peaking in early October)), and is exclusively known only from restiad bog habitats.

FLOWERING

(June)–July–(September)

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, White

FRUITING

October–November

LIFE CYCLE

Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild.

THREATS

Uncommon and rather sporadic in its occurrences. However it is a small, winter flowering species, so it is easily overlooked. Some accessible populations have suffered from plant collectors.

ETYMOLOGY

corybas: Helmet flower

rotundifolius: Round leaf; from the Latin rotundus and folium

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Considerable research is underway to investigate the validity of the segregate genera split from *Corybas* R.Br. by Jones et al. (2002). Whilst much of that work has yet to be published, on advice from Australian Orchidologists Peter Weston and Stephen Hopper (pers. comm., July 2011, November 2014), all of the segregate genera recognised for New Zealand by Jones et al. (2002) are returned to *Corybas* (see also Lyon 2014).

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) Some of this factsheet information is derived from [Flora of New Zealand Online](#) and is used under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand](#) licence.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Jones DL, Clements MA, Sharma IK, Mackenzie AM, Molloy BPJ. 2002. Nomenclatural notes arising from studies into the Tribe *Diurideae* (Orchidaceae). *The Orchadian* 13(10): 437–468.

<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/310769#page/2/mode/1up>.

Lyon SP. 2014. Molecular systematics, biogeography, and mycorrhizal associations in the Acianthinae (Orchidaceae), with a focus on the genus *Corybas*. PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/corybas-rotundifolius/>

PDF DATE

17 September 2024