

Thelymitra formosa

COMMON NAMES

sun orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Blue, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Very stout, robust, usually solitary (sometimes colonial) orchid which at flowering is up to 0.8 m tall. **Stem** dark red-green or dark green (sometimes glaucous) stout, smooth. **Leaf** 100–400 × 10–20 mm, linear-lanceolate to lanceolate, usually dark green to red-green, channelled and finely ridged, rather fleshy (almost succulent) and thick, sheathing high up stem. **Inflorescences** 10–15-flowered. **Perianth** 9–13 mm long, light to dark blue, without stripes or spots. **Sepals, petals and labellum** similar, all narrowly-obovate. **Column-arms** flattened, more or less channelled, with yellow or orange fringes and cilia arising from margins, each arm projecting from inner face of side lobule, usually standing much taller than anther. **Post-anther lobe** shorter than anther, erect, margins yellowish red and more or less thickened into finger-like calli; side lobules taller than anther, pinkish or yellowish, fleshy, with subulate erect projections on margins and with similar or more elongated tubercles across the surface.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinctive and singular species of *Thelymitra*. It has no obvious close relatives though sterile plants or those in bud have some similarity to *T. ixioides* Sw., from which they can be distinguished by their smooth rather than finely rough stems and overall dark-green to reddish green, rather than somewhat glaucous-green to silvery red-green leaves. When in flower, the combination of pale to dark blue unspotted to striped flowers, distinctively flattened yellow or orange fringed/ciliate column-arms which project from the inner face of the side lobule are especially diagnostic of *T. formosa*. *Thelymitra formosa* is a very robust orchid which is usually found as solitary plants, though on occasion it may found quite substantial colonies.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT

Mainly found in lowland to montane wetlands, scrub and open forest. Occasionally colonises roadside banks.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

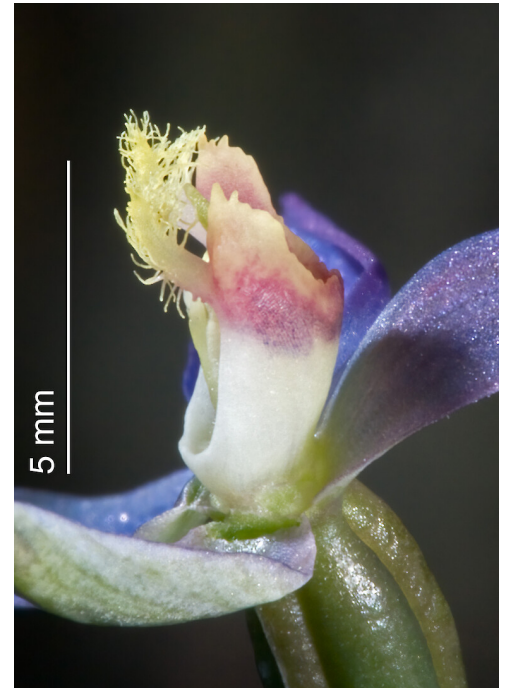
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: EF, Sp

THREATS

An apparently naturally uncommon, biologically sparse species. Based on old herbarium specimens it does not appear to have ever been common at any particular location.



Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 24/12/2011, Licence: CC BY.



Column. Kaitoke Regional Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 04/01/2008, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Thelymitra formosa Colenso

TAXONOMIC NOTES

There is some uncertainty over the application of the name *Thelymitra formosa*—the type suite is largely another species *T. hatchii* L.B.Moore so further work on the status of plants referred to by the New Zealand Flora Series, Vol. II as *T. formosa* is needed. Description adapted from: Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. II. Government Printer, Wellington.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

November–January

FRUITING

December–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).

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

thelymitra: Woman's hat

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

THEFOR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

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

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

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP, EF

2004 | Sparse

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

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

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/thelymitra-formosa/>

PDF DATE

12 October 2024