

Dendrobium cunninghamii

COMMON NAMES

winika, pekapeka, Christmas orchid, bamboo orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Epiphytic or rupestral, rhizomatous, perennial forming discrete tufted patches up to 1.5 × 2.0 m. **Rhizome** suberect to ascending, similar to stems, producing numerous more or less branched roots. **Stems** cane-like, long persistent, firm, wiry, and mostly slender, thickening towards base, up to 7 mm diameter, yellow-green, bright yellow to orange, glossy with obvious internodes and thickened nodes; unbranched in lower third, otherwise bearing numerous lateral, widely spreading, somewhat drooping branches. **Leaves:** sheaths tubular, minutely papillose, imbricating, covering younger stems; lamina 30–50 × 3 mm, dark green, green to yellow-green darkened at junction with leaf-sheath, narrow-linear. **Inflorescences** 1–6–8-flowered, produced several nodes back from the active vegetative apex, usually as short, slender laterals; floral bracts inconspicuous, short, tubular; pedicel very slender, longer than ovary.

Perianth 20–25–(30) mm diameter, glabrous, white (rarely cream), lip and column usually rose-pink, purplish to green. **Sepals** elliptic, spreading, apices more or less reflexed; lateral sepals fused under labellum and attached to column-base. **Petals** slightly broader. **Labellum** shorter, distinctly trilobed; lateral lobes small, often highly coloured, inclined to stand parallel to one another; mid-lobe white, broad, subacute, minutely crenulate; disc with 4–5 pale-coloured, low, longitudinal ridges terminating just above short claw and near to a colourful knob-like nectary situated at the end of the column-foot. **Column** about as long as its foot, cylindrical, very narrowly winged. **Capsules** initially green, ovoid, maturing greyish-white, often striped with maroon or purple.

SIMILAR TAXA

None. This species is easily recognised by its bright yellow to orange cane-like stems, tufted growth habit and spectacular, large white and usually rose-pink or purple flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

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

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Mostly epiphytic on forest tree trunks and branches, sometimes on fallen logs, and found as a also rupestral on rocks, cliff faces or banks. Occasionally colonising brick or concrete walls within urban areas.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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Pinehaven, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 16/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Silverstream, Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 18/12/2013, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

GENUS

Dendrobium

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Dendrobium cunninghamii Lindl.

SYNONYMS

Winika cunninghamii (Lindl.) M.A.Clem., D.L.Jones et Molloy

TAXONOMIC NOTES

The generic distinction of *Winika* from *Dendrobium* was always considered dubious by many orchidologists (M. Chase pers. comm. 2000), in part because little comparative data had been published to support the new monotypic genus (see Clements et al. 1997). Recently there has been much investigation into the validity of splitting the Australian *Dendrobium* into numerous segregate genera and some of those studies have included samples of *Winika* (Adams 2011; Burke et al. 2008). Garnock-Jones (2014) in reviewing these (and other) papers has questioned the continued recognition of *Winika* as distinct by New Zealand botanists, especially as outside New Zealand no one else is accepting it. Therefore, the traditional broad circumscription of *Dendrobium* is here favoured over the narrow, and *Winika* is treated as a synonym of *Dendrobium*.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

December–June

FRUITING

January–August

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a hanging basket in standard orchid mix. Often can be strapped to a tree trunk and provided it is kept moist during the drier months it grows readily. This species does best in semi-shade. Should not be removed from the wild.

OTHER INFORMATION

CULTIVATION

Occasionally available from specialist native plant nurseries

ETYMOLOGY

dendrobium: From the Greek dendron 'tree' and bios 'life', alluding to the wild plants being epiphytic on trees

cunninghamii: Named after Allan Cunningham (1791–1839) who was an English botanist and explorer, primarily known for his travels to Australia (New South Wales) and New Zealand to collect plants. Author of *Florae Insularum Novae Zelandiae Precursor*, 1837–40 (Introduction to the flora of New Zealand).

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

DENCUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2024 | 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 "[Regional conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Otago](#)" Jarvie S et al. (2024) report.

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.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Adams PB. 2011. Systematics of Dendrobiinae (Orchidaceae), with special reference to Australian taxa. *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 166: 105–126.

Burke JM, Bayley MJ, Adams PB, Ladiges PY. 2008. Molecular phylogenetic analysis of *Dendrobium* (Orchidaceae), with emphasis on the Australian section *Dendrocoryne*, and implications for generic classification. *Australian Systematic Botany* 21(1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1071/SB07038>.

Clements MA, Jones DL, Molloy B. 1997. *Winika*, a new monotypic genus for the New Zealand orchid previously known as *Dendrobium cunninghamii* Lindl.. *The Orchadian* 12(5): 214–219 (link to volume 12 entire).

Garnock-Jones PJ. 2014. Evidence-based review of the taxonomic status of New Zealand's endemic seed plant genera. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 52: 163–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.2014.902854>.

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

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1997).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/dendrobium-cunninghamii/>

PDF DATE

22 September 2025