

# Prasophyllum colensoi

## COMMON NAMES

leek orchid

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, tuberous, fleshy, glabrous, summer-green, perennial herb up to 300 mm tall when flowering. **Tuber** shortly ovoid, adjacent to or occasionally up to 10 mm away from previous seasons tuber. **Stem** erect, more or less smooth, terete, dark green basally tinged with red. **Leaf** shorter than or overtopping raceme; 100-300 mm long, dark green or reddish green, if dark green with base tinged red, terete, hollow, linear-lanceolate, apex acute. **Inflorescence** racemose. **Raceme** 5-20-flowered, flowers evenly spaced, or clumped together and more or less overlapping. **Perianth** green, yellowish-green, pale yellow, reddish-green to dark red or maroon, colours sometimes intermixed on the same plant. **Dorsal sepal** 5 mm long, ovate, concave, sometimes recurved; **lateral sepals** slightly longer, narrower, weakly fused in bud and usually remaining so at least near base, channelled, apex minutely cucullate, shortly apiculate, appearing bidentate. **Petals** a little shorter, wider, more delicate. **Labellum** of similar length, narrowed at base and almost sessile, occasionally shortly clawed, ovate, recurved but not abruptly so; margin entire, smooth to undulate; callus extending as an irregularly thickened median band almost to the narrowly subacute apex. **Column wings** of column bilobed, anterior lobe membranous and slightly shorter than anther; posterior lobe much smaller and more or less callus-like. **Anther** sessile, just overtopped by rostellum. **Stigma** barely its own height above column-base.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*P. elegantissimum* is very similar in height, structure and colour. *P. elegantissimum* has an overall more elegant, fine featured looking flower. The best feature to easily distinguish the species is the dorsal sepal, in *P. colensoi* the tip is acute, compared to the apiculate tip seen in *P. elegantissimum*.

*P. hectorii* which is a species of acidic wetlands where it usually grows partially submerged in water. *Prasophyllum colensoi* differs by its usually smaller size (up to 300 mm c.f up to 1 m tall in *P. hectorii*) and fewer, scarcely scented flowers (up to 20 cf. up to 80 in *P. hectorii*). The callus of the labellum in *P. colensoi* extends almost to the narrow apex; that of *P. hectorii* is more or less confined to the proximal portion, with the labellum apex wide, pale and mostly undulose.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North, South, Stewart, Chatham, Antipodes and Auckland Islands



Mount Climie, northern Remutaka Range.  
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:  
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Mount Climie, northern Remutaka Range.  
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## HABITAT

Coastal to alpine in wetlands, gumland and subalpine scrub, successional forest, tussock grassland, herb and fellfield

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## DETAILED TAXONOMY

### FAMILY

Orchidaceae

### AUTHORITY

*Prasophyllum colensoi* Hook.f.

### SYNONYMS

*Prasophyllum pauciflorum* Col.

## TAXONOMIC NOTES

Recent molecular and morphological studies, as yet unpublished suggest that the two New Zealand *Prasophyllum* will need placing in another, as yet undescribed new genus (Peter Weston *pers. comm.* November 2014) *Prasophyllum colensoi* is an aggregate species and at least two further, possibly unnamed entities warranting specific recognition could be separated from it. Forms found in Northland and on Great Barrier Island are especially distinctive.

UPDATE: The entity formally known as *Prasophyllum* 'B' by Irwin (2001), has since been described (Lehnebach *et. al.*, 2024), as *P. elegantissimum*. Another entity was suggested to exist, however the Lehnebach (2024) study dismisses this as a likelihood after examining the DNA and morphology of numerous live, electronic and herbarium specimens.

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## ECOLOGY

### FLOWERING

October - March

### FRUITING

January - June

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a sunny, free draining soil. Excellent in pots. 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

**prasophyllum:** From the Greek 'prasos' leek and phyllos 'leaf'

**colensoi:** Named after William Colenso (7 November 1811 - 10 February 1899) who was a Cornish Christian missionary to New Zealand, and also a printer, botanist, explorer and politician.

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to native orchids of New Zealand

### NVS CODE

PRACOL

### CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

### 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 Data Deficient [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

Irwin, B. 2001. Making identifications more difficult. *New Zealand Native Orchid Group Journal*. (Vol. 79, pp. 8–11).

Lehnebach, C.A., Alderton-Moss, J. and Shepherd, L.D., 2024. A new species of *Prasophyllum* (Orchidaceae) for New Zealand and lectotypification of *P. colensoi*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, pp.1-23.

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

#### ATTRIBUTION

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

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#### MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/prasophyllum-colensoi/>

#### PDF DATE

01 August 2025