

Spiranthes australis

COMMON NAMES

lady's tresses, spiranthes orchid

BIOSTATUS

Native

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, glabrescent, somewhat fleshy, perennial herb. Plant at flowering up to 1 m tall. **Roots** stilt-like, numerous, white, more or less swollen, clustered around stem base. **Tuber** broadly ovoid to ellipsoid. **Stem** erect, slender to stout, initially rather brittle, becoming wiry. greatly exceeding leaves. **Basal leaves** 2–10, obliquely erect, held in a loose basal rosette; lamina 50–200 × 5–15 mm; dark green to yellow green, often tinged reddish, narrow-elliptic, narrow-lanceolate, to lanceolate or almost spatulate tapering into a 20–100 mm long petiole; stem-bracts 2–4–(6). **Inflorescence** spicate. **Spike** 20–150 × 5–10 mm; flowers more or less crowded, subsessile, spirally around stem. **Ovary** glabrescent to finely glandular pubescent. **Perianth** 4–7 mm long, more or less tubular-cylindric, rose-pink, rose-red, red, pink or completely white. **Dorsal sepal** projecting forwards, column-embracing, more or less oblong, slightly concave except near the upturned apex. **Lateral sepals** divergent, slightly pouched at base, obtuse to subacute. **Petals** projected forwards, more or less oblong, more or less fused to dorsal sepal with their apices recurved. **Labellum** white or whitish pink with a white apex, broad and recurved at apex, more or less obscurely trilobed; mid-lobe upper margin more or less finely lacinate, much crisped, irregularly thickened; base sessile, concave, smooth, except for two prominent ovoid, lateral calli which fit beneath the stigma. **Column** narrow below stigma; anther obtuse, overtopping stigma; stigma broad and prominent, sometimes lacking rostellum, usually overtopped by delicate, membranous, lacinate column-wings.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily recognised by the usually perennial habit; preference for growing in muddy or partially flooded sites within wetlands; tufted habit, numerous, fleshy more or less lanceolate leaves which in flowering plants are clustered around a single tall multibracteate flowering stem; and by the numerous, small, tubular dark pink, red or white flowers arranged in a compact left or right sided helix. The labellum tips are white and finely fringed.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Chatham Islands.



Wainuiomata. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 21/02/2010, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane in open sites within wetlands of varying tropic levels but most frequently seen in acidic peat bogs. Also record from lake margins, and on the banks of slow flowing streams. Occasional in seepages within tussock grassland, or in damp shingle within river beds.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT, EF

THREATS

Extremely uncommon and has undoubtedly declined as wetland habitat has been lost and further populations within protected wetlands seem to require regular disturbance to flourish. There are now very few places where this orchid could be regarded as abundant.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Spiranthes australis (R.Br.) Lindl.,

SYNONYMS

Neottia sinensis Pers., *Neottia australis* R.Br., *Spiranthes novae-zelandiae* Hook.f., *Spiranthes sinensis* (Pers.) Ames.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

A range of forms occur in New Zealand, one has completely white, larger flowers with widely flaring labella, and another recorded from Motutangi and the adjacent Kaimaumu Swamp seems to be insect-pollinated. The status of these forms needs further study. Current thought is that all of these forms are best treated as one variable species *S. australis*.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Indeterminate

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

January–April

FRUITING

April–July

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Should not be removed from the wild. However, rather easily grown in a peat filled pot kept partially submerged in a tub of water, or in a suitably permanently damp, peaty, sunny spot in the garden.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

spiranthes: Spiral flower

australis: Southern

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to native orchids of New Zealand

NVS CODE

SPIAUS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 30

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, EF, Sp

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, EF, Sp

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2004 | Not Threatened

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.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970).

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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/spiranthes-australis/>

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