

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Habenaria rumphii

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Endangered

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

Habenaria rumphii is a terrestrial orchid with a fleshy underground tuber and leaves 14 cm long, 20 mm wide. The flower stem grows to 50 cm tall, is thin and wiry and bears up to thirty or more white flowers about 10 mm across. It is easily recognised by its scattered rosette of stiffly spreading leaves, the densely congested inflorescence and the obliquely erect labellum with the long mid-lobe and short pointed lateral lobes.

Flowering and Fruiting: February.

It was previously known as *Habenaria holtzei*.

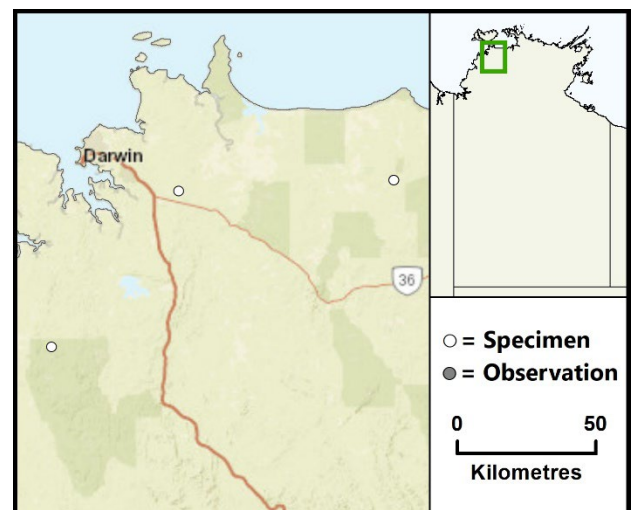
Distribution

It is known from the northern parts of Queensland and overseas¹. In the Northern Territory (NT), it has been recorded from the upper Howard River, Humpty Doo; northern Litchfield National Park and at two sites near Swim Creek, one being in Mary River National Park.

NT conservation reserves where reported: Mary River National Park and Litchfield National Park



Credit: I.D. Cowie



Caption: Known locations of *Habenaria rumphii* in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

Ecology

In the NT, this species occurs in woodland and grassland/sedgeland on low-lying sites that are heavily waterlogged or shallowly inundated during the wet season with emergent or overstorey species such as *Melaleuca viridiflora*, *Eucalyptus alba*, and *Lophostemon lactifluus*. It is known from a sand-plain adjacent to a spring-fed rainforest, in seasonally flooded woodland adjacent to a creek and from a drainage depression between low hills on dark clay soil.

Threatening processes

Threats across its range are to varying degrees, intensification of land uses, extractive industry, changes in surface and near surface hydrology and grassy weed invasion in conjunction with changed fire regimes. Sand mining in the Howard River area is a current and continuing threat both directly through clearing of individuals and indirectly through changes to hydrology. Grassy weeds, particularly *Urochloa humidicola* and changes to the fire regime are completely transforming the species composition of the herbaceous layer of shallowly inundated seasonal wetlands in the Darwin area. The shallowly buried, fleshy tubers are likely to be attractive to feral pigs, although there are no records of predation at this point. Parts of its range are also extensively subdivided for rural residential allotments.

In the NT, this species has been recorded from two localities in 1989 and 2016 and two localities near Swim Creek in 2019 and 2020. Plants at the upper Howard River locality were not relocated despite considerable survey of the location in 2000 and 2001. No additional occurrences were located in the Darwin-Litchfield-Kakadu area during targeted survey of apparently suitable habitat over the 2000-2002 wet seasons. The number of plants at three of the sites were very small and scattered, consisting of less than 10 individuals.

Conservation objectives and management

Further survey is required to establish the extent of the species distribution and population size and to establish the species' susceptibility to the threatening processes in the area. Recovery actions including demographic monitoring, fire management, weed and feral animal control and habitat reservation may need to be implemented.

References

¹ Jones, D. L. (1988). *Native Orchids of Australia*. (Reed, Sydney.)