

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

Calochilus caeruleus

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Northern Territory: Vulnerable



Photo: M. Armstrong

Description

Calochilus caeruleus is an erect terrestrial orchid, dying back to an underground tuber each Dry season. The leaf (to 40 cm x 8 mm) is shallowly three-cornered in cross section and fleshy. The flower stem (to 80 cm tall) is slender, wiry and bears four to eight flowers. The flowers are greenish with red-brown markings and red labellum hairs.

Flowering: December-January.

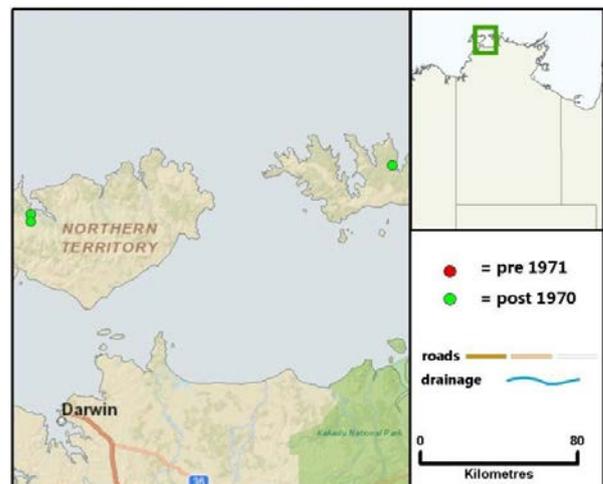
Fruiting: January.

Distribution

This species occurs in tropical Queensland, the Northern Territory (NT), Western Australia and New Guinea. In the NT, it is known from only three collections from Melville Island (in 1975, 1984 and 1992) and one on Cobourg Peninsula (2005). The Melville Island collections are likely to be from the same subpopulation.

Conservation reserves where reported:

Garig Gunak (Cobourg Peninsula) National Park.



Known locations of *Calochilus caeruleus*

Ecology

The species grows in swamps and seasonally inundated flats in open forest, wet heathland and *Melaleuca* woodland. The flower stem emerges before the leaves and these are not fully developed until after the seeds are shed. Each flower lasts about one day and usually only one or two open on an inflorescence at once.

Conservation assessment

This species is classified as **Vulnerable** (under criteria D1+2) based on:

- a population size estimated to be <1 000; and

- a restricted distribution estimated to be <20 km².

Current data supports a category of Endangered. However, it has been downgraded due to the probable negative collection bias associated with this species. The flowering period is short and occurs during the early Wet season (December-January) when preferred habitat is difficult to access.

The classification of data deficient is unwarranted because of the considerable survey effort on Melville and Bathurst Island during the Wet season in 2000-01 (Woinarski *et al.* 2003).

Threatening processes

With a very restricted distribution and small population this species is susceptible to stochastic events. As a terrestrial orchid, threatening processes would include weed infestation, changes in hydrology and impact of fire. The presence and impact of these processes are as yet unknown.

Conservation objectives and management

A Recovery Plan for this species, and other threatened plants on the Tiwi Islands has been implemented.

Further specific surveys are required to determine the status and management requirements of the population.

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References

- Jones, D. L. (1988). *Native Orchids of Australia*. (Reed, Sydney.)
- Woinarski, J., Brennan, K., Cowie, I., Kerrigan, R., and Hempel, C. (2003). *Biodiversity conservation on the Tiwi islands, Northern Territory. Part 1. Plants and environments*. 144 pp. (Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, Darwin.)