

Shelford Leek-orchid

# Shelford Leek-orchid

*Prasophyllum fosteri*

A Nationally Threatened Species of the Grassland Community

## Description

The Shelford Leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum fosteri*) is a small to medium sized orchid growing up to 30cm high. It has a single flower spike which can bear up to 25 (usually fewer) small green-brown flowers. Optimal time to see this orchid is during flowering which occurs between October and November; however the colour of the plant blends in with the surrounding environment so it is often difficult to see.

This species typically emerges as a single, erect and cylindrical green leaf in late autumn. The leaf will grow to approximately 12cm long over winter, and then in early spring the flower spike will begin to emerge from a slit in the side. Each flower is small (up to 8mm wide) and is usually green with red-brown markings. After pollination and seed set in late November the plant collapses and persists as a dormant underground tuber until it re-emerges again in late autumn.

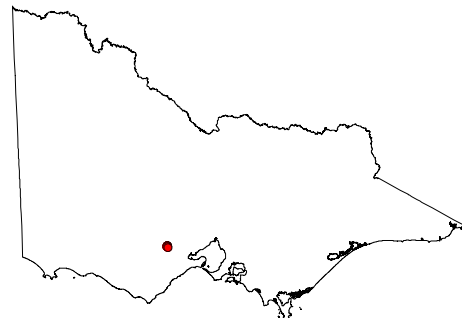


Shelford Leek-orchid flowering.  
Photo: Cath Grant (DSE)

## Distribution

The Shelford Leek-orchid is found only in western Victoria, and known to only occur on the western basalt plains in the Shelford area. It is likely to have been formerly more widespread prior to landscape scale clearing.

Only about 400 plants are known in the wild, all of which are from a single population on a council managed roadside.



Source: Flora Information System, DSE 2007

## Habitat

This species occurs in open native grasslands dominated by Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and with species rich perennial herbs and lilies. The soil is poorly draining red-brown soil derived from basalt.



Emergent leaf.  
Photo: Cath Grant (DSE)

# Shelford Leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum fosteri*)

## Conservation status

### National conservation status

The current conservation status of the Shelford Leek-orchid has been assessed according to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)* criteria and is deemed Critically Endangered.

### Victorian conservation status

In Victoria it is listed as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, and listed as Endangered in the Advisory List of Rare or Threatened Plants in Victoria 2005.

## Decline and threats

The decline of this species is a direct result of habitat loss, it is therefore important to protect and manage the remaining Shelford Leek-orchid population and potential habitat.

A variety of threats are known to exist at this population. These include weed invasion; site disturbance caused by road maintenance, stock movement and machinery; a lack of formal conservation reservation; and the highly restricted distribution which leaves the population at a high risk of extinction.

It is important to acknowledge that the roadside in which this population occurs is burnt regularly by the local Rural Fire Brigade. It is this management in the past that has maintained the species diversity and high quality of the native grassland roadside and thus has protected the Shelford Leek-orchid.

Threats that face other potential habitat of this species are the same as outlined earlier however could also include; inappropriate herbicide use; inappropriate fire regimes; heavy grazing; pasture improvement; ploughing; change in landuse to cropping; and rock removal.

## Further Information

If you want to find out more about this species or want to report any sightings please contact:

Cath Grant, DSE Ballarat, Ph. 5336 6604.



Shelford Leek-orchid plants and-habitat. Photo: Cath Grant (DSE)

### Why are threatened species important?

- Ecosystem maintenance – the complex nature of ecosystem relationships means that the removal or disturbance of one part of the ecosystem could affect the functioning of many other components – our knowledge of these relationships is incomplete, so the results of loss or disturbance are unpredictable.
- The sheer diversity of life is of inestimable value – many biologists now believe that ecosystems rich in diversity are more resilient and able to recover more quickly from stresses such as drought or human-induced degradation.
- Biological diversity is an intrinsic part of the aesthetic qualities in many areas valued in Australia for tourism and recreational purposes
- Extinction is forever...



Photos: Cath Grant (DSE)

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