

MIDGE ORCHIDS *Corunastylis* IN OUR AREA - Do you know the difference?

*... Margaret MacDonald
... Drawings Ruth Hurst*

The common name, Midge Orchid, refers to the tiny insect-like flowers, while the generic name, *Corunastylis*, is derived from the Greek *koryne* = club and *stylos* = column or pillar, referring to the clubbed style of the type species *Corunastylis apostasioides*. The genus was previously included in *Prasophyllum* and later in *Genoplesium* before being reclassified as *Corunastylis*.

Midge Orchids have a single, long, green cylindrical leaf that emerges after late summer or autumn rains. The spike of flowers grows with the leaf, and emerges through a slit in the top. The orchids are deciduous, and die back, after flowering, to underground tubers that are paired, with one tuber being replaced annually.

The flowers that appear in autumn and winter are held on a short spike at the top of a short, slender stem. They are referred to as “upside down” flowers because, as with Leek Orchids, the dorsal sepal is at the base of the flower, with the labellum on the upper side. The plants grow singly or in loose groups in forested habitats, heathland, and amongst grasses, rushes, sedges and small shrubs. They are generally inconspicuous, and can be difficult to see.

There are over 50 species of Midge Orchids, mostly endemic to Australia, with two occurring in New Zealand, and one in New Caledonia. Three species grow in the Anglesea District:



Fringed Midge Orchid



Bearded Midge Orchid

Fringed Midge Orchid *Corunastylis ciliata* – Latin *cilium* eyelash – referring to the hairs fringing the margins of the labellum.

This is an uncommon orchid in the area, and the first species to flower, usually in early March.

Up to ten flowers are crowded together, having yellow and green, hairless sepals and petals. The red labellum has an upturned tip. The flower stem is usually less than 15 cm tall.

Sharp Midge Orchid *Corunastylis despectans* – Latin *despectus* looking down upon – referring to the downward facing flowers.

This is a rare orchid in the area, which was missing for many years, until it was observed in the open forest at the back of Anglesea in 2009. Flowering, usually, in April, it grows to about 20 cm tall and bears about ten, dark, purplish brown flowers with green markings. The sepals and petals are all sharply

pointed and lack hairs.

Bearded Midge Orchid *Corunastylis morrisi* Named after Victorian botanist P.F. Morris, this is a common and widespread orchid, flowering in early autumn. Usually growing to about 20 cm tall, it bears up to fifteen, reddish purple flowers with the dorsal sepal, petals and labellum being fringed with long hairs.

Reference: MacDonald, Margaret (ed) 2009, *Flowers of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet*, ANGAIR Inc., Anglesea



Sharp Midge Orchid

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