

Orchid or demon: Flower of a new species of orchid looks like a devil's head

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New orchid species *Telipogon diabolicus*. Credit: Marta Kolanowska

A lone and unique population of about 30 reddish to dark violet-maroon orchids grows on the small patch of land between the borders of two Colombian departments. However, its extremely small habitat is far from the only striking thing about the new species.

A closer look at its flowers' heart reveals what appears to be a devil's

head. Named after its demonic patterns, the new orchid species, *Telipogon diabolicus*, is described in the open access journal *PhytoKeys*.

Discovered by Dr Marta Kolanowska and Prof Dariusz Szlachetko, both affiliated with [University of Gdansk](#), Poland, together with Dr Ramiro Medina Trejo, Colombia, the new orchid grows a stem measuring between 5.5 - 9 cm in height.

With its only known habitat restricted to a single population spread across a dwarf montane forest at the border between departments Putumayo and Nariño, southern Colombia, the devilish orchid is assigned as a Critically Endangered species in the [IUCN Red List](#).

Although the curious orchid could be mistakenly taken for a few other species, there are still some easy to see physical traits that make the flower stand out. Apart from the demon's head hidden at the heart of its colours, the petals themselves are characteristically clawed. This feature has not been found in any other Colombian species of the genus.

"In the most recent catalogue of Colombian plants almost 3600 [orchid](#) species representing nearly 250 genera are included," remind the authors. "However, there is no doubt that hundreds of [species](#) occurring in this country remain undiscovered. Only in 2015 over 20 novelties were published based on material collected in Colombia."



A close-up of the new orchid species *Telipogon diabolicus* showing its flower resembling a devil's head. Credit: Marta Kolanowska

More information: Marta Kolanowska et al, *Telipogon diabolicus* (Orchidaceae, Oncidiinae), a new species from southern Colombia, *PhytoKeys* (2016). [DOI: 10.3897/phytokeys.65.8674](https://doi.org/10.3897/phytokeys.65.8674)

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