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A.S.G.A.P. INDIGENOUS ORCHIDS STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER NO. 1

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The main reason for the formation of this group was inspired by the great work being carried out in the field and the laboratory in the present crossing programs and hybridising using our lovely native plants some decades ago the Queensland region had the strongest assembly of native orchid enthusiasts in this state.

Long before the formation of the popular present specialist bodies we crammed our benches with species orchids of Australia. In those days enthusiasts liked David Hockings, Bill Mitchell, Col. Harman, Jim Howie and yours truly, brought in their orchids for identification and listened attentively to David Hockings or perhaps Trevor Hunt about there culture.

Two great books were published, Orchids of Australia by David Jones. This author seems to have now entered into most botanical fields of writing. In the hope that we get good response to this group and that native orchid study be once more a vital part of A.S.G.A.P. I wish to launch this group with an article I had published about 20 years ago.

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KNOW YOUR NATIVE ORCHIDS PART 1

by L.P. Butt

The indigenous orchids of Australia are a fascinating group of plants but up till about the time that Alick Dockrill and W.H. Nicholls published books dealing with them in 1969 not very much had been done in a literary way about them to any great extent. Today they are very much to the fore, and quite apart from the various orchid societies there are several groups specialising in their study, and investigating corrections in their nomenclature. Such commendable work is not only enlightening but it creates again the needed interest for exploration and research.

Out of all this has come many cases of correct naming, the Dendrobium bigibbum (Cooktown Orchid) being typical of this. However just as important to the enthusiast is the fact that new species are turning up as a result of exploration, and the constant threat that older species can become extinct is being counted by the use of tissue culture. Last year I viewed first hand such a project, in Darwin with N.T. Species.

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I feel this method should also be applied to species that have simbiotic growth difficulties, such as the Dipodium group of ground orchids and the elusive but very lovely climbing orchid Galeola foliata. Already a lot has been done to cultivate difficult species, and the minute ground orchids of our forests and fields, can now be grown as successfully as their exotic cousins. When I say "Know your native orchids" this is not meant descriptively, but rather to know the cultural side of your plant or plants. Culture of all orchids is a individual thing and many people use various methods. The general care of all orchids is not something that requires elaborate equipment or any special knowledge. Rather, the rules are clear and simple but must be adhered to if the beginner wishes to accept the challenge of growing healthy native orchids that will flower for them. The basic principles are basically the same with all the family of orchids, finding a growing medium that is compatible, giving correct lighting and fertiliser, and taking precautions against plant pests and diseases. Here listed below are several of the best species that were once thought too difficult to cultivate, for all but the keenest enthusiasts. Most can be obtained from reliable nurseries dealing in orchids, while the terrestrials are mostly available at present from collectors only. Unfortunately, although some species are still available the minute species and varieties are still being ploughed under by heavy machinery in the hands of most developers. I could advise interested collectors to seek advice from the associated societies for growing Australian plants in your capital city.

Phaius tankervilliae

These may also be obtained from organisations like The Caladenias, and Pterostylis.
Phaius tankervilliae . . . This is my first choice, as I consider it is one of Australia's finest terrestrial orchids. This beautiful plant can have 10 cm blooms borne on a strong erect spike that rises from the base of a stout ovate psuedobcbulbs, each having a wide ribbed leaf. My own plant last year carried a spike of eight such flowers. There are several variations, as to the colour of sepals and petals, the best being white on the reverse and chocolate on the inside. The main labellum islemon verging to plum with a white flared lip. There is a yellow petalled form in North Queensland (Bernaysil). This plant was once common on the Gold Coast, growing in swamps just back from the then dunes in a wide area. However it was soon destroyed by land developers more interested in putting houses where the dunes were. There are still stands of it on the Moreton and Stradbroke Islands wisely protected by a strict conservation law. I have found the main form on the slopes of Buderim Mountain also. Plants can be grown in a cymbidium mix., commercially sold by some chain stores. However leaf-mould, charcoal sharp sandpeanut shells, rice hulls and peat moss are all useful in making mixtures for the orchid. It can stand half or broken sunlight. The tiny Corybas or helmet orchids have a single small leaf on the ground and generally are growing "En-masse". The rounded helmet flower appears to form on the leaf. Pterostylis orchids (greenhoods) flower on a thin stem that rises from a single prostrate leaf. Caladenias or fairy orchids, to spider orchids, like the two mentioned are also terrestrial but with a size variable from minute to large in the flowers. Western Australia has the largest flowering species some 25 cm. across the bloom.
All these orchids respond to varying mixtures of a loose loamy nature providing you allow good drainage. One grower of my acquaintance has so perfected the art of growing them that his potted specimens could be shown when in flower against many exotic species favourably. One thing is clear they do prefer natural light to glass house culture. All grow from tiny bulbs that form just below the soil surface.

This is only a brief article on a tremendous subject, but the main thing to remember is to take all such articles as a guide only, as personal practical experience leads to better growing.