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4/4/97

A.S.G.A.P. INDIGENOUS ORCHID STUDY GROUP **ISSN 1036-9651**

Newsletter 19 February, 1997

Group Leaders: Don and Pauline Lawie,
P.O. Box 230, Babinda, Queensland 4861
Phone: 070 671 577

The responses from members to our last newsletter have been very positive and we should have enough material for this letter to be a total members' effort, with Pauline and myself merely acting as co-ordinators. That is just what we have been aiming for. Thank you for your responses. We look forward to receiving more of the same. We are also pleased to be able to report that we can welcome a number of new members to our Study Group. Welcome to you all; your comments and experiences to share with us all are keenly awaited.

To begin, some member's comments arising from the last letter.

Our first respondent was Jack Van Dam of Berry, NSW, who writes:

Pterostylis: I repot during the dormant stage when they have died back. I place all the containers in an old shed where they dry out completely, then when I am quite sure the soil is thoroughly dry I sift the tubers out. I then mix the old soil with the new mix. The new mix is:

1 bag of old soil
1 bag of the cheapest potting mix (sterile)
1 bag sharp sand (same size bags as above)
1 x 2 litre ice cream container of dynamic lifter
1 eggcup slow release fertiliser for natives
1 matchbox of dolomite
¼ matchbox of trace elements
1 x 2 litre ice cream container of vermiculite
2 litres of worm farm liquid

The measures are approximate. Mix all the above and add enough water to make a nice moist mixture and leave to mature - the longer the better. (I use a concrete mixer). This mixture has been very successful for the last two years and I finish up with more Pterostylis tubers than I have pots. I have started experimenting with Zeolite by adding a couple of handfuls to the above mixture but as yet no full evaluation to hand. I will let you know later.

Jack also disagreed heartily with the statement that pelletised chook manure was not recommended for use in pots. This made me realise how badly I had reported that item. It is only when growing epiphytes in pots that this type of fertiliser is a no no because it turns into a sludge and inhibits drainage; it is evidently not a problem with terrestrials. (P)

Ethel Baxter of Indooroopilly has a better disposal method for Dendrobium beetles: I walk round my orchids with an old ice cream container with a couple of inches of water in it. I hold this under the beetle then lightly tap the plant. I find this a much more reliable method than trying to squash them in situ.

Cherree Densley, Killarney, Vic reports: I located quite a lot of Caladenia lyalli - Mountain Caladenia - flowering prolifically (groups of 10 - 12) underneath Snow Gums along the Porcupine Track in the Kosciusko National Park. These were the only orchids we saw close up in seven days in the Park. However, I did see a number of Dipodium punctatum along the Alpine Way as we travelled back to Victoria. They appear to flower much later here in the Western District of Victoria.

Mary Gandini of Cairns, Qld, had been away from home for some weeks: Home-coming was met by disaster in the shadehouse, the hanging baskets and the orchids. The watering system had "Gone bung" just after we left and there was no rain so many plants died. The worst disaster was my Phalaenopsis amabilis. Totally dead! It was on a tree so the weather must have been really dry. So was the Dendrobium mirbelianum which suffered the same fate. Many other small orchids in the shade house perished but I have others of the species.

Several orchids are flowering (2 Feb 97 - Ed) and some are in full bud at the start of the new month. Geodorum neocaledonicum has been out for some time and Spathoglottis plicata is always in flower. Bulbophyllum baileyi has produced many flowers which are yellow and turn bright red with age. Dendrobium rigidum has flowers most of the year. Plectorrhiza brevilabris has a pendulous spray of small flowers and Corymborkis veratrifolia has buds ready to open. Dendrobium x grimesii has buds, also Podochilus australiensis.

I am convinced that I can't grow Sarcochilus. They all die on me; maybe they need the altitude. My Dendrobium fleckeri all grow well, but never flower, and they are altitude orchids. Your last letter about Pterostylis prompted me to look for mine but they are not above ground yet. Last year some of them flowered; I think it was P. depauperata. I think it is later in the year when they surface, maybe about May or later.

Talking of terrestrials, Nervilia plicata is now above ground. I have not seen them flower but the pleated leaves are interesting. So are some Zeuxine oblonga and Malaxis latifolia (one has open flowers, but not tall like Pauline's last season). (Malaxis latifolia has been retaxed, but I don't yet know the new name. P.) Also at New Year some friends of mine found Eulophia zollingeri flowering in the Herberton area.

Ed: I had to go to the books to read about Eulophia. There are four species in Australia, and the species zollingeri is one of those fascinating, leafless, saprophytic orchids. It is mostly found along rainforest margins where a supply of decaying logs can be found, and flowers in summer after rain. Herberton country is dry upland sclerophyll forest, and a sighting of E zolligeri in flower would be a notable event.

Margaret Bradhurst of Lilli Pilli, NSW, wrote us in January: I feel that we belong to a study group and that should involve input from both members and leaders. The members will certainly gain more from

it if they have to research information themselves on a particular orchid and report on it. I find that the more that I read up on orchids the more fascinating the subject becomes and I do not think it too much to expect that all should contribute to the newsletter.

We have seven species of Pterostylis orchids growing in our little patch of bushland in Lilli Pilli Point Reserve. They are: Pterostylis nutans, P. concinna, P. curta, P. erecta, P. pedunculata, P. longifolia, P. grandiflora. The reserve consists of a few acres with the Hacking River on its southern border and residential properties on other sides. On the other side of Port Hacking the Royal National Park has its northern boundary. The bushland could be described as woodland and remnant rainforest.

PLECTORRHIZA TRIDENTATA by Margaret Bradhurst.

A few weeks ago I spotted a rather miserable specimen of Plectorrhiza tridentata (Tangle Orchid) for sale (off the back of a truck!) at our local Sunday markets. I had never seen one before, but knew that although it is rare in the Sydney area, it had reportedly been found growing in humid rainforest gullies in the Royal National Park. This specimen had two small racemes with four flowers on each, and it was seeing these tiny exquisite flowers which fascinated me and made me part with $5.

I have since been reading up on Plectorrhiza tridentata and find that it is normally a rather inconspicuous orchid, an epiphyte, which hangs in the air attached rather tenuously by one or two of its numerous tangled roots to small branches of trees and vines which can be found along shaded creeks and beside streams in rainforest gullies. In the Sydney area its host is often the Water Gum (Tristaniopsis laurina).

My specimens came from Bulahdelah in northern NSW (and came complete with NPWS collector's authority). It is found in the more coastal forests of NSW and Southern Queensland, and also occurs in Eastern Victoria and the higher ranges of North Queensland.

The name Plectorrhiza is from the Greek, Plectos meaning plaited or twisted, and rhizos, meaning root. Tridentata is Latin, meaning with three teeth (referring to the shape of the labellum). The leaves are narrow - lanceolate, 6-10 cm long and there are ten on my little specimen. The flowers are only about 4mm wide and are green and brown with a 3-lobed white labellum with yellow patches on the mid lobe. The dorsal sepal is brown and curved over the yellow column. The labellum seems to go down into a brown ringed green throat. It was only when I used my camera with its magnifying lens that I fully appreciated the beauty of this tiny orchid flower.

As far as cultivation goes, I understand that it is relatively easy to grow, and is long-lived. It can readily be attached to suitable garden trees or cork, and likes a shady position with high humidity levels. It needs to be kept well watered throughout the year because of its particular type of root system. Now all I have to do is to try to keep it happy and growing! I think that the $5 could be

money well spent considering the rarity of the plant, the savings in petrol, and maybe years of searching for it in its natural habitat. Bushfires in the Royal National Park over the past few years may have made it even more of a rarity.

Reference books I have been reading include:-
Les Robinson, "Field Guide to the Native Plants of Sydney"
A. Fairley & P. Moore, " Native Plants of the Sydney District"
D. Jones, " Native Orchids of Australia"
The Australasian Native Orchid Soc. Vic. Group, " Cultivation of Australian Native Orchids"

CYMBIDIUM CANALICULATUM R.Br. by Len Lawler

This splendid orchid will be familiar to native plant lovers who travel the drier country, from north of the Hunter River into Cape York Peninsula, across to the Northern Territory and into the Kimberleys. It seems to be the only orchid that has successfully colonised the outback.

The plant has provided food for aboriginal Australians, explorers and early settlers, and has been called "native arrowroot" in parts of Queensland. The orchid's pseudobulbs contain a considerable amount of starch which was made use of to treat diarrhoea and dysentery, and the orchid has been used for divers medicinal purposes by aboriginal Australians of the Northern Territory.

Despite its wide range, the plant shows remarkably little variation except in the colour of the flower. Rupp described some varieties and forms based on colour but these have not been accepted by later authorities. The dark-coloured form from north-east Queensland generally referred to as variety sparkesii is readily recognisable and reasonably consistent, but this name has not yet been accepted by the taxonomists.

In the huge territory which it inhabits, this orchid is by no means evenly spread, for it may occur in large colonies of many individuals, widely separated from each other by areas which are devoid of the plant. While in some places we may see it growing exclusively on one species of tree, in other places it may grow on several different species, and overall is happy on many species of different genera, some of which are but shrubs. Some individual plants grow to a huge size and may consist of several hundred pseudobulbs; such a plant in full flower is a sight to behold.

For several years now on my travels in central, northern and north-western Queensland I have been recording this orchid in an attempt to chart its distribution. My sightings to date have suggested a broad outline as follows. Travelling north from the Maranoa the western limits of the orchid broadly follow the Great Divide until, in the vicinity of Charters Towers, it moves both northward into Cape York Peninsula,and westward into the Gregory Range.

In Cape York Peninsula I have little information north of Coen, and virtually none from the western side of the peninsula. The westward

strand seems to cut out at about the Gilbert River. I have travelled extensively in the Gulf Country between Normanton and the Northern Territory border, and, despite local advice that it is "fairly common" here, I have not seen this orchid until near the border just south of Westmoreland.

I find it intriguing that C. canaliculatum has not been reported from Central and Southern Queensland west of the Great Divide apart from a sighting near Blackall and a report from Yaraka (both of which I would like to have confirmed). It is, of course, possible that changes to the country following white settlement have had a serious effect on habitat suitable for the orchid. It may be significant that this orchid was once regarded as native to South Australia "growing on the eucalypts of Cooper's Creek", but is no longer so regarded, as it is now thought to have been washed down from Queensland.

May I use the good offices of the Newsletter to invite readers to contribute to this project? All I need to know is-

date of sighting
approximate location - map reference or latitude/longitude not essential
if flowering, colour as "yellow/brown" or "black"
host tree if possible
further remarks are welcome

I am happy to discuss the project with all at any time, and will acknowledge all information.

Thank you in anticipation.

Len Lawler,
P O Box 58,
Atherton 4883
Phone (070) 912 336

From Pauline: We have just enjoyed the first flowering of our D. x superbiens. The Malaxis latifolia are as prolific and beautiful as they were last year, if not as exciting; inflorescences are starting on the Robiquetia gracilistipes; and D. lichenastrum var. prenticei have had flower or bud nearly all the time in the last 10 months.

Unfortunately many luscious new growths have gone to satisfy unseen chewing insects. I suspect crickets as I found a large one in an old tree fern slab when I decided to let the plant take its chances outside on a tree. In the past I have interfered as little as possible with the roots of a plant when transferring it from one pot to another or from a pot onto a mount or tree, but after finding the cricket, I checked other plants and found all sorts of insect nests, mainly ants. I now remove all previous medium, then cut cleanly any damaged roots and the results have been outstanding, which could, of course, owe more to the current growing conditions than my ministrations.

Does anyone have a control method for invisible chewing insects?

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