

A.S.G.A.P. INDIGENOUS ORCHID STUDY GROUP.

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We still haven't managed to get our machines to talk to each other,so we're trying a different method of newsletter production today: Pauline is doing her bit on her computer, and I'm doing mine on the RSL Word Processor. This may result in a bit of overlapping information,in spite of toing and froing to compare notes.

In this issue we have a follow-up to our report on the Kilsyth Orchid Rescue,with news of a couple of different rescues and some editorial comment. We have a couple of letters from members,a financial report,a book review,and...more??

KILSYTH ORCHID AND OTHER RESCUES: We had some comment about the rescue of the Kilsyth orchid: while it was recognised as necessary and proper, there was unreserved sympathy for the property owners,and concern that the same situation could easily arise with the growing trend to rural subdivisions. The various Plant Rescue Groups do a sterling job in rescuing as many plants as possible ,not just orchids,and they deserve full support of S.G.A.P.members. The Wallum Study Group,in S.E.Queensland has been carrying out this type of rescue for many years in the face of inexorable "development". The law in Queensland makes orchid rescue very difficult. A permit application has to name the specific area under threat,and enumerate the species and number of plants to be rescued. A fee also applies.This may make sense to the lawmakers,but when one sees an orchid on the ground,the law dictates that it has to stay there.

The Queensland State SGAP Bulletin,issues June 2000 & Sept 2000, have an orchid rescue story to make the heart glad:

In the June issue, editor Jan Sked reprints an item from the past: Qld Region Newsletter June 1962, in which veteran SGAPPER Win Bristow told of saving a root of *Diuris alba* from a building site,taking it home,potting then planting it, and was rewarded by strong growth and flowers. Win concluded the

article written 38 years ago with the prophetic words: " With so much of the
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habitat of many of our coastal ground orchids going under the bulldozer preparatory to building operations, it would appear that members should try to rescue some of these, and other dainty beauties."

In the June issue, Jan printed a follow-up letter from Win (who, incidentally, celebrated her 90th birthday four years ago), which is worth a direct quote: (the time is mid 1960s) "... we wandered along the Forestry tracks, looking for other treasures. We found one, a Pencil Orchid *Dockrillia teretifolia* (formerly called *Dendrobium*)- lying on the track, having been run over and squashed flat by many log hauling vehicles. I had two still-green pencils. I picked it up and commiserated over its condition. This is a tree-growing orchid and would have fallen off one of the felled trees. I decided to take it home and give it a second chance at life.

At home I soaked it in water all night and then attached it with strips of cotton rag to the branch of a tree on my southern slope at the top of the native plant section of my garden. Then I watched and waited. In about two weeks signs of new leaf growth began to show and I knew that I had saved it.

As the years passed, it grew and grew, until it formed a curtain 2 metres or more long and 1 metre wide. It began to flower two years after I saved it. When in flower it was gorgeous, leading to my calling it the " Bridal Veil Orchid". It is in a place I have been unable to go for the past 10 years but Carole (my daughter) tells me it is in good condition and still flourishing. When I was physically able and it was in its glorious bridal veil season, I used to rush down the hill to feast my eyes on it several times a day.

So, members (concludes Win) look out for saving injured plants"

When I read that, I remembered that I had made a very similar rescue several years ago. A dead tree had fallen into the road, and a branch carrying a small spider orchid (*Dendrobium tetragonum*) had been run over a few times. I brought home the poor thing and Pauline tied it into a *Callistemon* in the back yard. I've just been up to inspect it - it has two new stems, and is looking very happy. I'm not sure whether the present Act was in force at the time, but I probably performed some sort of illegal act by taking the squashed plant from the centre of the road. It would be interesting to find somebody willing to make a test case out of such an activity.

Reader's comments on the matter are again invited

FINANCIAL REPORT 1/7/99 - 30/6/2000

INCOME	(subscriptions @ \$5, plus grants/donations)	\$150:00
	Balance Brought forward from 30/6/99	<u>505:85</u> 655:85
EXPENSES	Stationery	\$12:00
	Postage	61:20
	Printing	<u>36:50</u> 109:70
BALANCE ON HAND at 30/6/99		\$546:15

Passbook - First Australian Building Society, account No. 4121848 S1 - actually shows \$551.13. No interest accrues on this account now. We are not too sure how we have almost \$5 too much in the bank.

CORYBAS

Margaret Bradhurst reports: I have achieved one ambition, and that is to finally locate and photograph all six species of *Corybas* orchids which were known to grow in the Sydney region. I also found another one which is supposed to be a tableland species only, yet I found it growing in the coastal Royal National Park. I was grateful to have an ANOS member point me in the right direction in order to locate a couple of the orchids.

Orchids found were : *Corybas aconitiflorus* (Spurred Helmet Orchid) *C. fimbriatus* (Fringed Helmet Orchid), *C. Fordhamii* (Banded Helmet Orchid), *C. hispidus* (Bristly Helmet Orchid), *C. pruinosis* (Slatey Helmet Orchid), *C. undulatus* (Tailed Helmet Orchid) and *C. unguiculatus* (Pelicans).

I have become quite fascinated with the helmet orchids, and their very size presents a real challenge when photographing them. Some are only 1 or 2cm high and I often have to place the camera on the ground to get a good side view. They like growing amongst damp leaf litter in shady situations, often under surrounding vegetation, so I carry a black plastic garbage bag to lie on and hope that I do not attract too many leeches in the process. It is one orchid, which because of its height, is not affected by wind, so at least I do not have to worry about keeping it still.

C. fordhamii grows in the margins of swamps and I was warned that snakes enjoyed the same habitat. Normally the orchids are only noticed after a bushfire has been through the area, because they grow in amongst sedges and ferns and are so tiny. I found some in August after a fire had been through the previous November. A friend accompanied me and we both had knee-high gumboots and my friend used a walking stick. The stick kept disappearing into soft ground, and altogether it was quite a 'circus'. The joys of orchid-hunting!

When looking for *Corybas* orchids, I usually watch out for their heart-shaped to rounded, ground-hugging leaves. Because they usually grow in colonies, it is easier to spot a patch of leaves than individual brown/maroon flowers. There are often

many more leaves than flowers, so having found the leaves I then examine them more closely for flowers.

I also enjoyed an outing with a group of ANOS people (15 blokes and me!) when we were given permission to look for orchids in parts of the Holsworthy army firing range on the outskirts of Sydney. It covers a huge area of pristine bushland, and is normally off-limits to the public. We are fortunate to have an army engineer in our local group. We found about 32 different species of orchids, some in flower, along with an assortment of shattered metal bits and pieces which we had been warned not to touch. I think these bits and pieces proved to be just as interesting as the orchids to many of the male members of our group!

Thank you Margaret for this great report. Margaret is to be admired for sticking to her ambition as snakes are not the only hazards - "I have also been uneasy about being out on my own in some of our local bushland reserves as I invariably come across groups of young teenagers, usually wagging school and up to no good. I admit to not feeling safe in those situations (especially carrying a camera!), and it is a sad reflection of suburban life in Sydney these days." Members will remember the beautiful photographs with which Margaret illustrated her article, Some Terrestrial Orchids of the Royal National Park, Sydney, printed in the September, 1999, issue of *Australian Plants*. May we have equally good photographs with another informative article in this publication in the future please, Margaret.

In an attempt to learn from our member's report, I consulted my 'bible', *Dockrill*, and discovered that only four *Corybas* are listed and status of one of those is questioned. I then turned to *Jones* and found that he lists Slatey Helmet Orchid as *C. diemenicus*, which he also calls Toothed Helmet Orchid, the same common name as he gives for *C. pruinosis*. Can you clear this up for us please, Margaret?

Mary didn't see any ground orchids when she walked to Kallorama Rocks with the bushwalkers in late June. She reports: orchids were in abundance. Hundreds of *Cadetia taylori* and *Bulbophyllum radicans*, lots of *Dendrobium adae* and *D. fleckeri* were on the rocks with heaps of young tassel ferns and a few *B. wadsworthii*. Strings of *B. evasum* were running up trees with *B. nematopodum*. A few specimen of *D. speciosum* were almost over the edge but they were small. On the way up there were lots of *B. Bowkettiae*. On the way down on a different route, over the edge I saw one specimen of *D. cancroides* and a huge *D. tetragonum*. What a wonderful orchid day. However none was in flower. I am sure there were others but I can't remember at the moment...if I stop to look now I will probably get distracted and not finish this letter.

Writing of her own collection in mid July, Mary says: *Dendrobium malbournii*, *D. rigidum* are flowering and *Cadetia taylori* has finished. *D. discolor* is budding-up and if I can keep the insects away should have a good flower show. I have had a few losses with all the wet weather, mostly the ones in quinkan which seems to have remained too wet. Maybe the pots should be shallower so that there is not too much substrate. The one I felt most was a *D. speciosum* on a *Grevillia* stick outside. It was totally collapsed when I found it. It was so sudden. The *D. carronii* that I bought that day at Mareeba had a spray of flowers for quite some time. *Sarcochilus ceciliae* is doing well in Spanish moss on the shelf in the orchid house just as we were told to

put it. It has developed several new roots. I only hope that this dry weather is not so severe after all the rain that it sends the orchids into shock. What a disaster.

Mary was commenting on the dry weather in July. Over the August/September period Cairns had 39 days without rain beating the 1972 record by one day and becoming the longest time without rain since this type of record was first kept in 1941. We've even had a good, long spell of cool, fine weather in Babinda, and the plants are loving it. Don and I were away for most of August so I missed seeing the flowers on some plants, and I did not get to work quickly enough to protect the buds on two plants whose flowers were going to positively identify them. My consolation is that I still have the plants and no doubt they will attempt to flower again - one of them I've had for over 20 years!

I feel that I don't know anything about ground orchids. (I keep forgetting about the ones we have growing: *Geodorum densiflorum*, *Spathoglottis paulineae*, *Dipodium pictum*, *Vanda hindsii*. *Spath. plicata* is in flower nearly all the time so is not so highly prized. Our *Phaius tancarvilleae* is now a good sized clump and currently has four spikes carrying from buds to seed pods, and the *Zeuxine oblonga* has buds.) When a friend told us she could almost guarantee showing us *Thelymitra nuda* we were off for our second two hour drive to look at plants within a week, this time into serious four wheel drive country, hilly open Sclerophyll forest, criss-crossed by rocky creeks. We still have not seen the Sun Orchid, but *Caladenia carnea* var *carnea*, many with three flowers to the stem, were in abundance, as also was *Dendrobium jonesii* in full flower. We found plenty of others but without our resident expert we could not be sure what they were in spite of consulting our reference books. My main thrill of the day was to witness the pleasure of people looking at tiny *Bulbophyllum bowkettiae* and *Phreatia crassiuscula* flowers through a "spy glass". I think we might score a new member here!

My *Cym. suave* is flowering spectacularly (I know Doreen's is too) and my *D. smilliae*, *D. johannis* var *semifuscum*, and *Eria kingii* are coming into flower. *Oberonia titania* has been flowering for months. The *Cym. madidums* (the best of which had 15 flower spikes) are starting to fruit. I hope my theory that plants flower profusely when they sense mortality will be proved wrong, but who but the most foolhardy will insist that plants only react to previous conditions. It is common knowledge that fruit growers stress trees to maximise flowering and subsequent fruiting. I'd be afraid to do it on purpose to an orchid.

One of my neighbours who has recently retired and has more time for her plants endorses my theory of plants' prescience. She recounts that one plant in a hanging basket grew a shoot down to the better watered ground and established itself there allowing the original in the basket to die. Another, which did not like its position, gradually worked its way around the corner of the house into more sun and then stayed put. Is it only orchid lovers who know that a plant's life is as well worth all our efforts as is an animal's? Can you imagine the Government giving me a grant to bring injured plants back to health so that I can release them back into the wild? I wonder how many seeds Win's beaut rescue has put back into the wild.

THE ORCHID THIEF by Susan Orlean, published by Vintage, Random House, London.

Anyone with the slightest interest in orchids will find this book enthralling. Those interested in human behaviour will be equally fascinated.

Susan Orlean didn't even *like* orchids but she was intrigued when she read about four men being in court for stealing rare orchids from a Florida swamp. They stood trial on the charge "that on December 21, 1994, Laroche and his three Seminole [indian] assistants had illegally removed more than two hundred rare orchid and bromelaid plants from the Fakahatchee... They were accused of criminal possession of endangered species and of illegally removing plant life from state property..."

The how and why of taking the orchids and the defence offered while revealing much about Laroche, is paramount to the story and raises the same questions that are asked in Australia: Should rare and endangered species be "protected" in situ and allowed to die? (In Queensland the official answer is yes.) Should native peoples be allowed to do whatever they wish with anything, plant or animal, on their land? The decision in the Ghost Orchid Case, as it was called, is not disclosed till two thirds of the way through the story and shows that the Americans are no closer to satisfactorily solving that situation than we are.

The Orchid Thief is not fiction. The facts distilled from four years of research into why people, mostly men, become obsessed with orchids are presented imaginatively and with enough detail to satisfy the reader who knows a bit more than the basics. The Latin is used as well as the common name so that plants can be properly identified. While Florida orchids and collectors are the main focus, we learn that this obsession is worldwide and has been well documented over the past 150 years. There is even a report of a warning in the British Herbal Guide of 1653 that orchids should be used with discretion.

The exploits of the early collectors, mostly employees, are hardly believable: Some lost their lives, the names of many are not recorded, and the honour and glory all went to the men who paid them. In 1894 one of the best known orchid growers in England, Frederick Sander, had twenty-three hunters collecting for him round the world.

The history of the development of this part of Florida with names like The Everglades, the Fakahatchee Strand, Okaloacoochee Slough and the Caloosahatchee River excites comparisons with Australia and our management of land, people, plants and animals and our arrogant efforts to control nature.

Laroche questions whether the author will fall under the orchid's spell, and as the collectors, their behaviour and their collections are analysed it is obvious that the research has been conducted with the same single-minded obsessiveness required to be a dedicated orchid collector. Says Orlean: "I don't even especially *like* orchids. What I wanted was to see this thing that people were drawn to in such a singular and powerful way." Has she seen it? Will she continue the search? Which orchid do you most want to see/own?

