

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

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On the last page of Newsletter No 37, Pauline mentioned the problems she was having with her *Cymbidium suave* due to exhausted potting mix and difficult weather. She re-potted the plant in a mixture of quinkan (volcanic scoria) and pine bark, and instituted a watering regime of full immersion for 40 minutes twice a week. This plant was given to us by our friend Doreen, and Pauline was a bit reluctant to accept it since it's natural habitat - hot dry sclerophyll forest - is so alien to our lowland wet tropics. We've now had the plant for a couple of years and it has flowered profusely and was doing well until it nose-dived. I'm very pleased to relate that the remedial treatment has been a success: There are five healthy stems with leaves up to 30 cm in length and one new stem, 5 cm high with three leaves already and a tiny one emerging from the centre of the larger leaves.

Orchids are often perceived to be "delicate things" but when one considers the variety of habitat that members of the Orchidaceae have colonised, one realises that they are tough critters indeed. Hence Pauline's determination that just because an orchid looks dead, that doesn't necessarily have to be so. Massive doses of TLC work wonders on orchids as well as humans.

I'm in charge of the *Cymbidium suave* at present as well as all Pauline's other orchids, since she has gone off to London to attend our daughter Marion who is shortly to present us with our first grandchild. Pauline will be away for seven weeks and will be a tower of strength for Marion & Ian, far away across the world.

In the meantime Donald has control of the Newsletter. We keep a number of files relevant to the Study Group - finance, newsletter, correspondence and co-ordinator, and incoming mail is attended to and sorted without delay. I've just been doing some "tidying-up" and found several items that had not been filed at all, dating back to late July/early August

last year. It's tempting to blame the absent member for such slackness, but I suspect that the fault was mine. Two of the letters are still relevant, and I apologise unreservedly to the members involved (and also the co-ordinator for an unbanked cheque!) for my inefficiency.

Anne McHugh wrote to us on 16 July 2001: "... my interest in orchids is photographing the small ground orchids and trying to identify them. I have a lot of slides of ground orchids from all over Australia, including one I photographed in W.A. which turned out to be an exotic import from South Africa- presumably arriving with the ballast sand which was off-loaded over there!

At the moment I have a couple of slides taken this Easter in the Kilcoy district (Ed: SE Queensland between Caboolture & Kingaroy) which I am having trouble putting a correct name to. I saw the orchid plants growing in the Bellthorpe State Forest. They were not in flower at the time. Some friends who live in the area turned up in Kilcoy a day or two later with the orchids, in flower, in a food container!!! Horrors!!! What could I say? I took slides of them and planted them in a cool spot in an old lady's garden in Kilcoy. They were beautiful little creatures and I would love to know just what they are.

My best guess is: No 1 is an *Acianthus*. It had a single heart-shaped leaf about 15mm diameter and with a purple reverse. The flowers numbered about five on the stem and are a lovely translucent pinkish grey with fine wine stripes. The top sepal is rounded and hooded, almost like a greenhood and measured about 5 mm.

No 2 could be a *Chiloglottis*. It had two opposite pale green leaves at ground level, the edges of which were slightly wavy. The single flower was mainly dark red with pale cream tips to the top sepal and the two lower laterals, which were thin. The "hood" or column was pale cream and green with tiny spots and the labellum was typically dark and knobbly, no doubt to attract a specific insect or wasp.

Do you know who I could contact to identify these orchids, or do you know of a publication that lists and illustrates the orchids of the Southern (Qld) areas? I am way out of my territory here and know how these little beauties vary."

ED: well, there, a very detailed description - does any of our members recognise these two orchids? If you'd like to put a name to either or both, please let us know and we'll pass it on to Ann - less than a year after the request was made!

Our next un-filed letter came from Marjorie, who wrote on 5 July 01:

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" Some SGAP friends ask me where I get my orchid "species" from. Answer (in part) is via a nursery which gets them from MULGACOMBE PTY LTD. You probably know them, but just in case here is info:- address: P O Box 44, Forest Hill Q 4342; internet: HTTP://WWW.mulgacombe.au.cf Phone/fax: 0754 654 450. They are licensed to collect from the wild, but only sell through nurseries. They have a list and will take "wish list" orders. Currently (ED: remember this was written Jul 01) they have *Calanthe triplicata* (retail about \$16.00) and *Liparis reflexa* . They won't give you a list with prices as they only wholesale to nurseries all over, including Townsville. They also have a fact sheet. Hope this helps some more members."

Belated thanks, Ann & Marjorie, please don't let this lapse stop you from writing again.

"The Orchadian"- Official Journal of the Australasian Native Orchid Society. Pauline mentioned this magazine in our last newsletter, and her copy of the January '02 issue arrived last week. There are several items worth mentioning: The Australian Orchid Foundation has awarded its prestigious Award of Honour to David Jones, in "recognition of his enormous contribution to orchids in Australia and internationally". The article details David Jones' lifelong involvement with plants in general and orchids in particular. He has written or co-authored many books - we have his "Palms in Australia", "Australian Ferns & Fern Allies", "Climbing Plants of Australia", "Native Orchids of Australia" and his 1986 book "Ornamental Rainforest Plants" was the book that started to impart the knowledge of our surrounds that I had long sought. This award is well deserved.

"The Orchadian" also has a comprehensive article on growing Terrestrial Orchid from Seed, by Dick Thomson of Templestowe Heights, Victoria. This is advice based on experience.

The third item of interest is a colour photo of the orchid *Corybas dienumus* from Macquarie Island, Southern Ocean. I mentioned this orchid in our newsletter No: 36 (but I had the species name wrong) where I marvelled that plants can live in a place with an average temperature of 4.8 degrees and constant fierce wind. It's interesting to see a photo of the plant - I very much doubt that I will make the attempt to view it *in vivo* !!

The SGAP Queensland Bulletin, Sept 2001, included an article, "Our Magnificent Swamp Orchids" by John Moye, SGAP Far North Coast Group, NSW.

The article dealt with the terrestrial, *Phaius tancarvilleae*, in
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particular, and gave details of its cultivation. One method of propagation suggested seemed to be achievable even by me, so I had a go:

The flower stalk (which is about 60cm high) is removed and cut into segments each of one or two nodes. " These are placed in a container of water deep enough to completely cover the nodes, but leaving the upper stalk above the water level. Tiny plants develop at the nodes underwater. The segments can be removed and potted up when it is thought that sufficient root and leaf development has occurred."

Our *Phaius* were just finishing flowering when I read this, so I cut the stems and placed the pieces in water in a clear plastic, cut-down pet soft drink 1 litre bottle. I put this where it would get good morning light and awaited results. The following months developed into one of our hottest and most prolonged summers that I can remember. We had endless days of sunshine (rare in our wet climate) and I had to top up the water level regularly. One stem developed a perfect little underwater orchid, growing on the node. The others slowly blackened and died, and the little plant did likewise before it was big enough to pot. In hindsight, I should have realised that the sunshine was heating the water to an unacceptable temperature and I was cooking my stems instead of propagating them. Well, I'm just not accustomed to the sun shining every day...

This year I'll have another go, and with a bit of luck learn from my mistake. In the meantime, the *Phaius* patch is growing vegetatively, and presents an eye-catching spectacle for several weeks of flowering.

"Growing Australian" the Victorian A.P.S. journal for March '02 has an encouraging story of the treatment of the critically endangered Mellblom's Spider Orchid *Caladenia hastata*. This once common orchid has had a chequered career and was once regarded as extinct. Interestingly, flowering is stimulated by HOT fire, and a large colony was discovered south of Portland after a wildfire in 1976. The area became an industrial site, and in spite of careful re-location of many plants, by 1996 only ten known plants survived. The site manager, Portland Aluminium, were very supportive, encouraging every effort to preserve the orchid. Seed germinated accidentally on site, the colony grew with much care, and today numbers 57 adult and 550 established seedlings. Isn't it good to be able to finish a newsletter issue with a success story? Thanks to Andrew Pritchard, A.P.S. Vic's Endangered Plants Officer.