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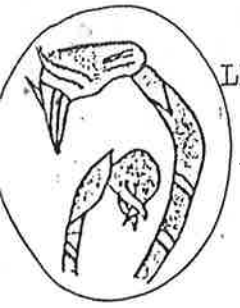

A.S.G.A.P. Indigenous orchid study group
LEADER Mr. L.P.BUTT 07-8483515
ASST. Mr Brian Runnegar 07 2861164 Newsletter NO.7
following material from articles by W.andD. N.O.S. INC
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ILLAWARRA GREENHOOD - A VERY SPECIAL ORCHID

The Illawarra is fortunate being the centre of a very rich orchid region. For most, the word 'orchid' brings to mind large, exotic and beautiful flowers. Most people are aware of some of the Australian examples of tree and rock orchids, including the once locally common rock orchid (Dendrobium speciosum var speciosum), which is grown in many local gardens What is not usually known is the close on 200 ground (terrestrial) orchids which can be readily found in all the natural bushland in the Illawarra. These are usually small herbs with underground tubers which remain dormant during summer. Common terrestrial orchids include Pterostylis (greenhoods), Diuris (donkey orchids) and Corybas (helmet orchids). At Minnamurra Falls and some other well known Illawarra waterfalls are the only known sites of Pterostylis pulchella. It is fortunate in having its distribution within the boundaries of the Illawarra State Recreation Area and therefore protected by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Not so fortunate is Pterostylis gibbosa, the Illawarra Greenhood, which happens to be one of the rarest orchids in the World which is now only found in the Illawarra.

The Illawarra Greenhood is a small herb with greyish green leaves forming a rosette on the ground. It's leaves appear in April and it flowers in September from a stem which develops from the centre of the rosette of leaves. On this stem which reaches about 30 cm in height are 5 to 6 flowers which progressively open and flower. Each flower is about 25mm long being bright green in colour. The labellum (the feature that makes orchids so attractive) is dark brown and is used to trap small insects which aid in its pollination. By late October the yearly cycle of the orchids has ended resulting in the plants dying down until the following Autumn.

What makes the Illawarra Greenhood so rare is it's habitat. It is only found in a few restricted sites not far from Lake Illawarra in the little remaining Eucalyptus-Melaleuca woodland. Most of this habitat has long been cleared for agriculture and ALL remaining sites exist on land (both private and public) where development is already intended or is likely to occur in the future. At present some of the private land is covered by a preservation order from the Heritage Council of New South Wales which only provides for temporary protection. As well submissions have been sent to Shellharbour Council and the State Government in an attempt to get the few sites left declared Flora Reserves to provide permanent protection.

The local organisation which is working for the survival of the "Illawarra Greenhood" is the Wollongong and District Native Orchid Society Inc. which is the local group of the Australasian Native Orchid Society. (ANOS).

LOCALS, NATIVES, AND THINGS

By Stephen Popple.

Orchid growers everywhere are faced with the problems of plants which refuse to grow, the secret lies in studying how the plant grows in its natural environment. This series of articles is designed to illustrate how our native orchids grow in our district. Even for the non-native grower, the point is: know your plant.

Cymbidium suave

An intriguing orchid whose mention at an orchid meeting soon leads to a vigorous discussion on how best to grow it. Botanically, it is an odd-ball Cymbidium, with its elongating pseudo bulb system, which continuously produces leaves. Some authors suggest it is a distant grandparent from which the typical Cymbidium, (as we know it) evolved.

This orchid is very common in the Blue Mouhtains and Sydney districts. Its habit of growing in tree hollows, often high up, means it can be passed unnoticed! Don't be mistaken in thinking it's a little plant, large plants several feet across are common in suitable locations. Though common in this area, the populations in the State forests around Taree, where old tree stumps abound, far exceeds the local population. Its host range is wide, occurring locally in Turpentine, Bloodwood, Stringybark, Banksia serrata, and Angophora

Flowering occurs around October-November, with the racemes gently arching down carrying numerous closely-packed flowers. The flowers locally vary from a light brownish green to golden green and are fairly long lasting. The specific name, suave, means sweet, no doubt in reference to the delicate fragrance of the blooms. If you wish to see a magnificent specimen of C. suave in flower, visit Springwood Golf Course in late spring, and look for the plant bordering the fairway on the 2nd hole, it's worth a look!

C. suave is readily available, even from general nurseries, so that intending growers should have no trouble buying a plant. When buying a plant, look for a youngplant with about two leads instead of buying the old plants characterised by long 'stems' before the leaves start. This is because the smaller plants seem to get away quicker than the woodier, old plants.

The secret with this plant, which has a reputation of being hard to grow, sources say, (less than 1% of plants collected survive longer than 2-3 years), is to disturb the roots as little as possible and once potted, leave it alone! Growers can be seen using flower pots, baskets, tree fern trunks, terracotta pipes, old limbs, and old drums to grow this plant in. The main cause of failure appears to be growing the plant in a pot or equally small container, with the plant soon fading away. The use of hollow limbs, pipes, etc. seems to produce the best results, though a loss of portability e.g. (to monthly meetings) occurs. However, a deep container must be used to allow room for ample root run; old time residents tell of cutting down trees for timber and finding the roots of C. suave growing right down to the stump,(perhaps as far as 30 ft. from the plant).

Most growers seem to use old, rotten wood from the insides of the tree trunks to fill their chosen containers, and the results indicate that this is well worth the trouble of getting it. The plants receive plenty of sunlight growing high in the trees, with very little protection from extremes. In cultivation, a well-lit position is essential to stimulate good flowering.

The amount of light influences leaf colour with over-shaded plants having dark green leaves, with pale yellow-green leaves indicating conditions are right. One tip worth remembering is that if your plant looks like flowering within the first twelve months, nip the spikes out as they develop, it means another wait for flowers but the plant will be stronger for it.

This plant has the curious habit of being able to throw up a pseudo bulb several feet down the tree with comparative ease. I've seen this several times and am certain that it is not a separate plant developed from seed but rather an off-shoot from the parent clump. Growing in trees, this orchid is particularly exposed to the ravages of fire, growing as it does in open country. Study of plants burnt in fires shows that although the foliage is lost, new shoots soon initiate from the base of the plant.

The key to watering is not to overdo it, as this orchid can take fairly dry conditions, if the roots aren't restricted inside a narrow container.

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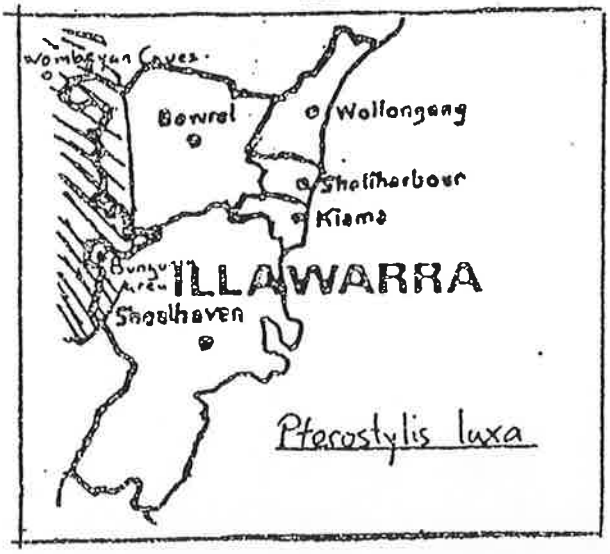
* This article is reprinted from a series of articles I wrote for Blue Mountains District Orchid Society, however it is still relevant for Wollongong.

LAXA

PTEROSTYLIS ~~PULCHELLA~~ Blackmore



Pterostylis laxa is found in the western extremes of the Illawarra (as defined and outlined on the map). The flowers are true to it's name in that the lateral sepals tend to be lax giving the flower a loose appearence. It is a typical cauline species in that it flowers well after good summer rains. This year was a particularly good flowering season at Wombeyan Caves where the hills were extensively covered with flowering plants (18/3/89).

Pterostylis laxa can be expected to be found on the grassy slopes at higher elevations and is often accompanied by other cauline species including Pt. reflexa, Pt. truncata, Pt. obtusa and Pt. coccina. Pterostylis laxa has an extensive distribution extending west from the Marulan area to the Blue Mountains, south to Canberra and the Snowy Mountains and east from Marulan as far as the Sholhaven River including the Bungonia area.

Pterostylis laxa is a variable species in regard to size, colour and shape. At Wombeyan Caves flowering plants within a small area ranged in colour from light green, green with brown suffusions towards the extremities (most common) brown and red.

Cultivation of Pterostylis laxa is easy but is not alway a reliable flowerer. It multiplies well and has become increasingly common in collections and was available in good numbers in the 1988 tuber bank.

Pterostylis laxa is worth the effort (including being precipitated upon) of visiting in the wild but ensure that you pick a year when summer rains are good otherwise the trip may be in vain.

CORYBAS FORDHAMII Rupp

Corybas fordhamii is a little known orchid and until August this year was unrecorded in the Illawarra. To add this species to the already large list of Illawarra orchids took a little luck and a lot of searching. I was fortunate being informed that last year a Corybas was found in a swamp at Maddens Plain. I was taken to the spot and after much searching found some leaves that appeared to be likely to be a corybas of some kind. No flowers were found but their swamp location suggested Corybas fordhamii.

One week later Ron Tunstall and I went back to the site and spent about two hours searching for a flowering plant. Fortunately two flowering plants were found comfirming that this species does exist at Maddens Plain.

Corybas fordhamii is closely related to Corybas unguiculatus (found at Seven Mile Beach flowering in June) but is rarely seen. Even so one of our members Brian Whitehead has found this species in northern N.S.W. in a swamp south of Port Macquarie (Orchanian Vol. 2 No.10). Corbyas fordhamii has an extensive distribution from South Queensland to South AUstralia. This distribution however is very disjointed since its known sites are few.

Identifying this species is not difficult. It flowers late Winter (August) at Maddens plain and has a small leaf which is green on both sides. The flower is small and delicate in appearance. Its labellum is tubular in shape with the dorsal sepal covering it. The flower sits on a stem which is another similarity to Corybas unguiculatus.

If you wish to see Corbybas Fordhamii it favours the wet ridges of swamps under the cover of thick vegetation. All you need is a lot of time and patience and an appreciation for the swamp fauna. It is likely to be found in many of the extensive swamp areas above the escarpment but finding it would not be easy.