



# THE MONTHLY BULLETIN OF THE KU-RING-GAI ORCHID SOCIETY INC.

(Established in 1947)

A.B.N. 92 531 295 125

12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 Volume 63 No. 12

Annual Membership : **\$15 single, \$18 family**

*Patrons - Pauline and Trevor Onslow*

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**Society mail to -** PO box 1501, Lane Cove, NSW, 1595

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**Committee :** Di Flinders  
**web site (active link) :** <http://kuringaiorchidsociety.org.au>  
**Society email :** kuringaiorchidsociety@gmail.com

**Next Meeting :** Mon 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Venue :** *The West Lindfield Community Hall, corner of Bradfield Rd and Moore Avenue, West Lindfield.*

**The hall is open from 6.00 pm.** Please try and get there early to help set up tables and chairs. There is much to do on this special night. A small number of members already help in this way but more helpers will make the job much easier and quicker. Don't just leave it all to 'someone else'.

**Don't forget, this is Christmas party night, special arrangements apply :** (more detail on page 2)

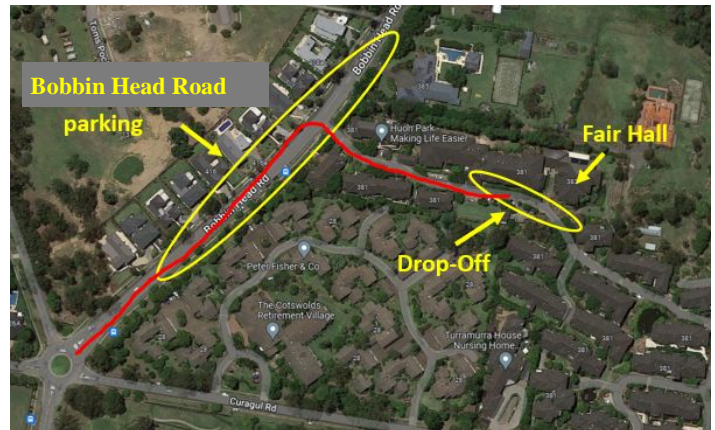
1. There is no Sales Table, Culture Class, or guest speaker. **There is still a full benching of orchids, BUT .....**  
(a) the party and monster raffle mean that benching space is limited. To help us manage table space in the hall, we ask you to minimise the total number of plants you bench. Perhaps just bench a few of your best ones.  
(b) **please note that benching doesn't start until 7pm and there will only be 30 minutes for benching - benching must be completed before 7.30pm.** (Do your best to fill in benching cards correctly, and please, fill in your cards at home, before you get to the hall, *Even if you have to wait until you get there to add the benching class number, advance preparation does help.*)
2. The actual **meeting commences early at 7.30pm.** We want flowers all benched and you sitting down by then.
3. **COVID 19** – Our check in process at the front door hasn't changed. **All attendees must be at least double vaccinated.** Many members have already shown proof of vaccination at recent meetings but as we are expecting attendees, who may not have had vaccination details checked, we will be asking those people to show proof of vaccination at the door. Please bear with us. This is necessary to for the safety and well-being of all.  
**Please, if you are feeling unwell - do not attend. And, as there may be larger than usual numbers in attendance, we ask attendees to wear a face mask at all times other than when you are eating or drinking.**
5. **The FOOD – The Party** starts around 8pm. Due to the COVID situation, the **Society will be providing all the food, and drinks, including dessert.** ONLY appointed helpers will be allowed in the kitchen. --- For this year at least, **we ask members to NOT bring any food extras to share.**  
**Drinks** – the society will supply drinks, but members may bring their own tippie if they wish. Just no glass and no sharing please.  
**Cutlery and Plates** - The society will supply a quantity of disposable cutlery and plates but members are invited to bring their own for personal use if they wish. If you bring in something in which to drink wine or whatever, that is ok, but please, NO ACTUAL GLASS containers (a condition of hall hire).
6. **The main entertainment feature of the night is the traditional Monster Christmas Raffle.** The Society supplies two Christmas hampers, and a few other prizes, but **members are all asked to also donate one or two presents as raffle prizes.** There are no rules about what your donation may be but please, **no trick gifts or booby prizes.** Make it something nice, something desirable, a prize you would be pleased to win yourself. I suggest that a minimum value would be around \$10 – 20. Examples might be an orchid, chocolates or other sweets, etc. If you are donating plants or orchids but they are smaller or of lesser value, perhaps box a few items together.
7. **The Final Instruction** - This is a light hearted night where we all share our hobby in a social environment with partners and guests. Please come ready to have a most pleasurable night, and if I might be so bold, how about introducing yourself to a few people you don't yet know and try to widen your connections and theirs.

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**President Dennys' Desk** – Thank you all for a great November meeting which marks the end of our yearly benching competition. The benching scores are in, and preparations are underway to recognise the efforts of all members who benched during the year. For our new members, the benching competition restarts at our December Christmas party.

**Christmas Party** – We have not had a Christmas Party for two years so it is good to restart this year, although it will not be the same as it has been in the past since there is still a need to keep COVID risk as low as we can. The council has also placed constraints on the use of single-use plastic ware and glass bottles are not to be used during functions in the hall. We will be preparing food in the kitchen and serving it in the adjacent annex under more controlled conditions. Members will not be required to bring food since all the catering will be done by our society. It will make it easier if members can bring a self-picnic-set such as plates, cutlery and drinking vessels. We will be supplying some paper cups, paper plates as well as wooden cutlery. All the soft drinks and water provided will be largely in cans. Some light beer will be provided. We are still exploring the issue of supplying wine in non-glass containers. The Christmas raffle will still take the same form, so please bring in a small raffle prize.

**Outreach announcement** - Wed 7th December – As part of the Huon Park Christmas Fair (a retirement village) we will be doing a small orchid display, orchid culture advice, potting demos, and just a small member's plant sales area. The address is Huon Park, 381 Bobbin Head Road, North Turrumurra. If you have a few plants to sell they need to be appropriate. Perhaps in flower, not too big or too small, yellow sales tags the same as at meetings, and not too many. If you need Australian Native Orchid tags I will have these on site.. 15% commission will apply. Setup starts at 8 am so, if dropping plants off, the best way to arrive is from Bobbin Head Road, Drive into the centre as per the map and find some drop off parking in the area shown and then move your vehicle back up to Bobbin Head Road or try and find a vacant visitors spot. We don't need many people on hand, but you are most welcome to stay and help sell and discuss plants with people at the fair. It is about having some simple fun in an orchid context. We will be located on the verandah area of the Fair Hall building.



**KMC Grant success** – I am happy to report that our society's application for a small equipment grant from the Kuring-gai Municipal Council has been successful and we will be using the funds to purchase a new projector very soon since our current one is in urgent need of replacement. It will benefit our volunteering members greatly and will add additional value to our LGA community outreach presentations on orchid culture. On behalf of our society, I thank the council for considering our application as being worthwhile.

**Wearing masks** – The latest reports by the ABC indicate that COVID cases are still high in NSW but thankfully, waning. Although COVID Safe rules have changed, the wearing of masks in indoor spaces is still recommended. If you are unsure about this, please visit, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe/guidance-on-wearing-face-masks>. If you are still concerned about the transmission of COVID or flu, then please feel free to continue to wear a mask at our meetings and use the hand disinfectant dispensers just to help keep the risk as low as we practically can do so. I will continue to wear a mask until I feel it is safe not to. Note that we will still be registering attendances at the Christmas Party.

**Member's welfare** – personal challenges occur all the time, so please remember, if you need to speak to someone immediately then you are most welcome to contact me at any time, 24/7 on 043 88 77 689.

### ***Just to be sure, let's, recap on Arrangements for the 12<sup>th</sup> Dec Christmas meeting night :***

(a) Mon Dec 12<sup>th</sup> is a week earlier than our normal meeting night to avoid family Christmas arrangements.

\* The hall opens early at 6 pm, we need helpers to set up the tables and chairs

\* The meeting also commences **early at 7.30 pm.** Benching is **between 7 pm and 7.30 pm**

**Don't be late.**

(b) There is still a **full benching** of orchids (*as per any other month*). **BUT** – table space is limited due to the party arrangements and benching cannot start until 7 pm. **YOU ONLY HAVE HALF AN HOUR to 'bench'.**

We love to see all those beautiful orchids benched each month, but we ask members to **reduce the quantity of plants a little and just bench your best**, just for this month.

(c) **Prepare Early** - We don't want you all stressed out before the party. Please plan your arrival early and leave yourself enough time. Make out your benching cards at home as best you can. **And Please** wear your **name badge**. You know why. We don't all know each other as well as we might and it greatly aids social contact. Put your name

tag in the car right now so you don't forget, *and wear it when you get there.*

**(d) Meeting Formalities** - There will be a brief "formal" part of the meeting from 7.30pm to announce the winners of the benching point score competition from throughout the year and including covid interrupted years, and the handing out of associated prizes. It also allows the judges time to judge the orchids benched on the night. We all know that we want this part over as quickly as possible and to get into the party but be patient. The boss knows all that too.

**(e) The Monster Christmas Raffle** is the main entertainment feature of the night. The Society supplies two big Christmas hampers, and a few other prizes, but we depend on you to make up the majority of the donated raffle prizes. Be generous, 'tis the season' to be merry, to be generous and to wish well to all mankind. Let's see a truly monster raffle for our first party for long time and have most go home winners of at least something. We suggest something worth around \$10 - \$20. Orchids are an obvious choice but don't forget we also have partners and guests along so prizes don't have to be orchids. It could be books, chocolates, exotic plants. If you want to donate plants or orchids but they are smaller or of lesser value, perhaps box a few together. **Please though - no tricks, no plastic plants, no booby prizes. Make it something you would be pleased to win yourself.**

**(f) The Party food** - The Society provides all the foods, including dessert, and a limited range of soft-drinks, beer and cask wine. We specifically ask that for this year, **YOU DO NOT bring food contributions.**

If you have special dietary requirements and need to bring food or drink specific to meet your own needs, then by all means go ahead but be aware that kitchen space is off limits. There will be no facility for cooking or warming anything you bring. And please, NO REAL GLASS. Hall hire insists no glass.

**(g) Plates, cups, and 'cutlery'** - the society will supply a quantity of disposable plates and wooden disposable cutlery. However, members may bring their own for their own use. We especially ask that you do bring your own coffee or tea mugs/cups. Whatever such items you bring with you must also take back home with you at the end of the night.

*Donate lots of raffle prizes, buy lots of Raffle tickets, have fun, meet new friends, and go home happy*

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#### **Other News Items**

**1. New Members** ----- At our last meeting three new members signed up with our club. Welcome aboard to Pearl Tong, Penny Prott, and Helen Wong. I hope you make many new friends among our members and enjoy our meetings. Please other members, seek out our new members to introduce yourselves and make them welcome. It isn't easy to become acquainted in a new group when you first join up.

**2. Membership Fees** – with all the other good news it seems incongruous to have to say this but needs must apply. Now is also the season to renew your annual membership fees. Current fees are \$15 single, \$18 family.

You can pay by bank transfer to **Westpac Bank, BSB No 032 188, account name - Ku-ring-gai Orchid Society Inc. and account number 103568.** If you use this method, please use **your full name as the payment description or your phone number** if your financial institution does not allow you to enter your name. If you wish, you can email [kuringgaiorchidsociety@gmail.com](mailto:kuringgaiorchidsociety@gmail.com) to confirm your payment.

You can also pay Jessie Koh, our membership secretary, in person at a meeting by cash or a cheque made out to **Ku-ring-gai Orchid Society Inc** or alternately you can also post a cheque to KOS, PO Box 1501, Lane Cove, 1595.

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**The Bad Parrot** A young man (John) received a parrot as a gift but the parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, and laced with profanity. John tried to change the bird's attitude by saying only polite words, playing soft music, and anything else he could think of but nothing worked. Finally, John was fed up. He yelled at the parrot, the parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even more rude. In desperation, John grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed, but then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep for over a minute. Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer.

The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behaviour."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude but as he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behaviour, the bird spoke-up, very softly, "May I ask what the turkey did?"

**Poster in Church** – "When you enter this church it is always possible that you will hear the call of god.

If you want to speak to God, enter, find a quiet spot and talk to him. However, it is unlikely he will call you on your mobile. The rest of us thank you for turning off your phone when you enter.

If you really want to see him in person, send him a text while driving home.



## Best of the Evening Hybrid – *Dendrobium Gerald McCraith* – benched by Seb Torrisi



This is a wonderful hybrid. It was made back in 1995 by Phil Spence who may have even still been one of our members back then. The parents are the New Guinea species *Den. convolutum* and *Den. engae*, both from Dend. Section *Latourea*.

**Section *Latourea*** contains about 50 species with a centre of distribution in PNG but spreading as far as the Philippines and Samoa. The 45 species from PNG are epiphytes of rainforest trees from sea level to high altitudes, usually in areas of year round rainfall. The plants, and the long lasting flowers, vary substantially in size.

The section is closely related to the Australian Sect. *Dendrocoryne*, with species like *speciosum* and *kingianum*, but is distinguished by the fleshy flowers and way the lip is attached to the flower.

Most pseudobulbs are club shaped (thin at the base and then widening), but they vary greatly. Some being stout, and some long and slender. The leaves are borne near the apex of the stem and the inflorescences also arise from near the apex, often appearing terminal. The lip is prominently three lobed and has a prominent raised callus (JB: a raised fleshy protuberance, often in the form of parallel ridges on the lip). Some large flowered species are particularly spectacular and are becoming popular in cultivation. Here are few example of popular species.



**D convolutum**



**atrovioleaceum**



**spectabile**



**engae**

I think my favourite among the *Latourea* has always been *Den. convolutum* with its lovely lime green flowers and almost black tongued lip. The plant is also perfectly sized to my eye, being only 30cm tall, but alas, it has a serious defect for growers in Sydney. The cursed thing comes from low elevations in Morobe Province (NE coast of PNG) and its nearby offshore islands. This is hot equatorial stuff. Daily relative humidity 85-90% temperature high twenties or more. Rain 10 to 15 days per month. Not an easy climate to replicate in a growing house here (or anywhere for that matter). I have tried to grow it several times and kept one going for several years once, but I don't recall ever flowering it. Such is life.

Which leads of course to why Phil's cross of *convolutum* with *engae* was such a success. *Den. engae* is a widespread species from the highlands. It grows high on large branches of *Nothofagus* (Southern Beech) trees in mountain forests at around 2000-2700 m elevation. It's much higher natural elevations make this a reasonably cool grower in temperate climate zones. It is a little larger in stature at around 50 cm tall but is a good grower and has attractive cream to greenish flowers with a purple striated lip.

*Gerald McCraith* is a nice blend between the two. Much easier to grow than *convolutum* but still with green flowers and a dark lip. A little taller than *convolutum* not as big as *engae*. It grows quite well as a shade house plant in Sydney but I would guess you wouldn't want to test it under frosty condition so some care and common sense applies. 10 different cultivars have been awarded and it's highest award so far is 'AM'.

Seb's lovely orchid has been grown into a stunning specimen. A real eye catcher, particularly close up, and the cross seems to adapt well to being grown as a specimen. These days though, when I see a beauty like Seb's I can't help thinking what a task it will be to repot next time. I think I am getting old.

There are many beautiful *Latourea* hybrids but the different species vary dramatically in flower form and colour, and some are decidedly warm growers from the lowlands. If you are thinking to grow one you may need a little advice as to what to expect from any given cross.



Congratulations Seb. That's your first BOE for a while and it's good to see you back in the cut and thrust.

**Best of the Evening Open Species – *Cattleya lobata* variety *alba*** grown by Peter and Jane D'Olier



What a beautifully grown and flowered species, and how unusual it is to even see it in flower in a collection.

The Orchidwiz description for *Catt. lobata* tells us : “Brazil. Plants grow near Rio de Janeiro on almost vertical, east-facing rock cliffs at 700–2600 ft. (200–800 m). They are exposed to strong winds and almost full sun, but the roots are buried in cracks in the rock face which protects them from bright light and excessive drying. The cracks contain rock chips but very little vegetable matter. Plants sometimes grow in the tops of trees where they are exposed to maximum sunlight and strong air movement.”

Now that is an orchid with an extreme environment.

I have seen this species at meetings from time to time and it does come up for sale regularly, but most growers find it hard to flower. It seems to demand just about full sun for a good part of the day to flower, or at least that is what I understand of it. I have never grown this one.

But whatever its requirements are, Jane and Peter seem to have found the secret. Their plant was presented and displayed beautifully.

A mature *lobata* has an upright, skyward pointing, stiff leaf atop a 20 cm pseudobulb. The leaf can be 30 cm tall so it is considerably taller than the pseudobulb. *Cattleya lobata* comes in white and all shades of pink through a bluish violet. Apart from the *alba* form, the lip is usually a contrasting darker shade of the colour of the rest of the flower and the 30 cm inflorescence carries up to 5 large (12-14cm diam) flowers.

If only it were a little easier to flower, I feel this orchid would be a really popular orchid as it is certainly tough enough and beautiful enough. -- Congratulations Peter and Jane. A real delight.

**Best of Evening Novice – *Den. Lindleyi*** grown by Anthony Mobbs

This is really lovely species that used to be called *Den. aggregatum*. It is widespread across southeast Asia, including Sikkim, Bhutan, NE India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and southwestern China. Plants usually grow on the trunks and branches of deciduous trees. It grows at various elevations but seems to be mostly lower elevations like 500 -1000 m but it is seen up to 1400 m. The key to note here is that even 1400 m is not very high in regard to the inbuilt cold tolerance of an orchid. These are WARM growers.

I have some interesting tales of comparison. Trevor Onslow and I live relatively close, both along the same ridge line, north of Hornsby. The ridge that Galston Road follows. I live on the part of Galston road that starts to wind down toward Galston Gorge, and Trevor near the top of ridge. I am perhaps 100 – 200 feet lower in elevation than Trevor and perhaps 2 or 3°C cooler in winter. (not just elevation, I am behind a hill to my east.)

*Den lindleyii* has always been marginal at my place. My roofed shade house is too cold for it in all but the mildest winters. I have tried it in the heated glasshouse but that doesn't really suit either because it really wants a bright, dry, but still warm winter. In my glasshouse it is warm enough but too humid and not bright enough.

Trevor grows and flowers *Den. lindleyi* magnificently every year. His growing area is attached to the back of his house, is roofed, bright, and definitely that bit warmer than mine. While I must admit that Trevor is clearly a better grower than me, I have to tell myself that those few degrees difference are also a significant factor.

In another tale of comparisons, some years back Cynthia and I joined a small group of growers Phil Spence was leading on a trip to Cairns and the Atherton tablelands to visit nurseries, private growers, and a few local spots to see native orchids. My first surprise observation was that every orchid nursery in those northern climes grew *lindleyi* as a weed. There were huge flowering clumps by the hundreds wherever we went and it was cheap. I would guess if you broke off a chunk and sat it on the bench, it would grow into a flowering clump by itself in no time. Clearly, climate is the difference between growing marginally in Sydney and growing like a weed in Cairns.

But if that puts you off trying *lindleyi*, how about if I tell you that *lindleyi* is just one of a spectacular group of *Dens* known as section *Callista*, and that most of the others are far more accommodating in their growth requirements.

There are only 10 species in Sect. *Callista*. - They are not deciduous, and they flower in pendent tresses like bunches of grapes. Like *lindleyi*, they all come from mainland Asia, from India through Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and southern China, with one species in peninsular Malaysia. They are medium size plants that grow epiphytically and often form large clumps. Except for *lindleyi* and to a lesser extent *chrysotoxum*, they grow at moderate to rather high elevations. All these areas have a distinctive dry winter season. They flower profusely in late spring to early summer and are very attractive.





### Samples of *Dendrobium* from Section *Callista*.



thyrsoflorum

densiflorum

farmeri

bronckartii

chrysotoxum

lindleyi

Mousmeee

The one slight distraction with this group is that the flowers are just a little short lived. Depending on the species they last from only a few days to a week before they fizzle out.

Species like thyrsoflorum, densiflorum, farmeri, and bronckartii (syn amabile) all grow cold in Sydney and most are easy to grow, even out hanging under the trees in the backyard. They are highly prized by orchid lovers and gardeners, and are always sought after when they come on sale. If you want your first 'Callista' try thyrsoflorum or densiflorum. They are available, hardy, reliable and beautiful.

### Other November Benchings



Den. Super Model 'Fancy' benched by Betty Ng



V. coerulescens x Holc. subulifolium John Chang

**Den Super Model 'Fancy'** – What a lovely orchid. Super Model is one of the famous Yamamoto nursery crosses and was registered in 2006. Interestingly, it contains 25% of the miniature species Den. moniliforme which probably accounts for keeping its height down to 30-45 cm but also for making it a very compact grower.

I didn't find any awards recorded for Super Model as yet, and so far I only found two named cultivars. Betty's cultivar 'Fancy' and another called 'Platinum' which is similar but a bit paler coloured.

Nice one Betty, and really well grown and flowered.

**Vanda coerulescens x Holcoglossum subulifolium (not registered)** – Now who doesn't love a blue or blue lipped flower. Man has continually experimented with every blue orchid to try and improve it or do better. Or perhaps it is just to be the one who made something new. Who will ever know?

Vanda coerulescens has always been a favourite with its upright to horizontal racemes of small but exquisitely coloured flowers. It is usually a violet blue with a darker lip but colours vary a bit. The flowers are about 3 to 4 cm across with up to 20 or so on a spray.

A similar species in many respects is Rhynchostylis coelestis (left) with even more densely flowered, upright spikes of small flowers. It also comes in blue with a darker lip but other cultivars can be all white or white and blue, and also pink.



Both are moderately sized plants for the

Vanda alliance and both are warm growers needing a heated glasshouse in Sydney.

V. coerulescens has been very successful as a hybrid parent. It has been crossed with a dozen different Vandaceous species and with other hybrids. Quite a few progeny are awarded but not so many recently. Rhynchostylis coelestis has proven more popular and successful in the traditional round shape blue flowered types. The most favoured seem to be those with mid-size





flowers (perhaps 5 or 6 cm), densely flowered and with at least a blue lip and one of the best is an orchid call Vandachostylis Pine Rivers.

So what about John's plants other parent – *Holc. subulifolium*? This is a miniature Vandaceous plant from a wide swathe of the lower slopes of the Himalayas from Myanmar to Vietnam at moderate elevations of perhaps 1200 m to 2500 m, sufficient for it have much more cold tolerance than *V. coerulescens*.

*H. subuliferum* grows suberect to pendent and only to a length of 15 to 20 cm. It has closely set semiterete leaves, and has a 15 cm inflorescence with about a dozen 3 cm white flowers. A really attractive little species that could create a very attractive mini hybrid.

As you can see from John's hybrid, the blue lip from *coerulescens* has come through. I don't recall the plant itself from the meeting so I do know that terete leaves and pendent habit are usually dominant.

I look forward to seeing this one when you grow a bit bigger John as I suspect the best will be seen as a specimen.

Congratulations on yet another lovely orchid you have shared.

### And more November Lovelies



**Den. Genting Lipstick**



**and LC Aquifinn 'Dorothy' (G&L Bromley)**



**Phal unknown (T. Miller)**

I could just eat that delicious looking white and purple dendrobe flower, but as it turns out I might as well try and eat it because there is no way I could grow it. Den. Genting Lipstick is one of those tall growing antelope style dendrobates that are 90% warm growers and when grown properly can be 2 metres tall. Gorgeous flowers but out of my league.

The second picture is also one of the Bromley's lovely orchids and I chose to mention it because of the splash petal feature that is becoming more and more popular in the Cattleya alliance. Aquifinn is a moderately modern hybrid having been registered back in 1974 but the 'splash petal' that it features dates right back to nearly the beginning of man's romance with creating orchid hybrids. The 'splash petal' feature stems from one species – *Cattleya intermedia* variety *aquinii* (right) which has a mutation known as peloricism, where the petals display some of the genetic changes that are usually specific to the labellum.

These Catt. *intermedia* mutations have proven to be stable in hybridization and are transmitted reliably in hybrids. The example here is just one sample and peloric mutations have been found many times in the wild for *Cattleya intermedia*. In this sample it is essentially just the colour from the end lobe of the lip that is duplicated in the petals but in other examples, other features like some of the striated callus formations in the lip that guide the pollinator to the column, are also replicated.



By breeding the peloric colour feature with larger flowered Cattleyas, man has developed lovely big showy splash petal flowers like Garrie and Lesley's Aquifinn 'Dorothy'. Fascinating.

And lastly, I felt I had to comment on Trevor Miller's startlingly different Phally. Yellow is a feature hybridists have been developing for a long time as there are no naturally yellow species Phals. They nearly have it down pat now and there are some really lovely yellows but this one of Trevor's is a bit different. I haven't seen a 'Cream' Phally before, and a purple lip too. I may just be out of date, but I thought it looked wonderful.

Phalaenopsis are produced commercially in huge numbers for flowering pot plant sale these days and as such are almost never sold named. Searching Orchidwiz I found a couple that that could at least be forebears of Trevor's Phal. i.e. Brother Little Yellow Boy, and Phal Hsingying Fortune, but who knows. Good one Trevor.

**A BIT ABOUT . . . *Cymbidium suave*    © Gerry Walsh    <https://therocklilyman.com/>**

*Reproduced with the kind permission of the author, a great student and observer of Australia's native orchids. His website The RockLilyMan contains wonderful info on a variety of Aust. Native orchid subjects but in particular Dendrobium speciosum.*



I DISCOVERED the world of native orchids in 1975, courtesy of the local Municipal Library where I'd gone to positively identify those lilies growing atop the big rock near the old farm house . . . the same rock my father used to hide 1080 rabbit poison and other farm chemicals on. Apparently I was fond of sampling anything in a bottle, including some diesel fuel that looked for all the world like Coca Cola to my circa 1955 eyes.



It was certainly a safe haven for storing such nasty things and it wasn't until 20 years later that I found my way on to the top of that rock. There appeared to be no harm done to the massive clump of *Dendrobium speciosum* that seemed to be devouring the collection of rusting drums and assorted iron relics from yesteryear that adorned this mesa of a rock.

In the Library I discovered that the lilies were in fact orchids. I spent hours fingering through the few books that dealt with Australian native orchids. After six months of wearing those pages thin during frequent visits to 'The Book' I had a pretty good idea about the various shapes that many of the local NSW species assumed. I certainly learned that *Cymbidium suave* was very different to the rest . . . it had long grassy leaves and striking, colourful blooms. I had a feeling that I'd seen plants very similar in several spots about my old bush haunts.

So it was high on my list of desirable plants and one to pursue in order to claim a specimen for proud display in my infant, but burgeoning bush house. Over the next year and a half I dragged home an assortment of botanical odds and sods having green, strap-like foliage including clumps of native Iris and even old tussocks of several denominations – but *C. suave* managed to avoid my searches utterly.

Then a mate of mine was transferred to Bega in southern NSW. On most visits to his place I managed to sneak in a few jaunts into the local bush, most of which was ear-marked for the Japanese wood-chip mills down at Eden. Many dirt tracks had been built through this vast area of Spotted Gum dominated hardwood forest and we had great fun exploring them although at the time we wondered why so many miles of well formed roads were built for seemingly little reason. December 1976 saw us out searching for the hollow logs I needed in order to induce my parrots to nest. It was there in a big old stump left from previous logging operations that I made my first sighting of *C. suave*.

And what a grand initiation it was to this too often ignored native wonder! The stump was about 3 metres high and 1.5 metres through. The deep spring-board slots were still visible on the trunk where the old timber-getters had perched precariously with axe and cross-cut saw. That clump of *Cymbidium* was around 50 cms across and as high – a real old-man clump. Best of all, it wore a skirt of olive-brown flowers that cascaded right around the base of the leaves.

Using the old spring-board chops as steps, I climbed up onto the top of the stump and squatted beside that incredible floral display. My mate thought I was mad . . . he's the sort of bloke that would concrete his front yard and paint it green if his wife would let him. Neither of us carried a camera that day, unfortunately. How often have I been caught without my camera! These days I rarely leave it at home. I've learnt the lesson.

**a similar remnant stump**

That day I saw dozens of clumps of *C. suave* mostly growing in similar old stumps, but quickly discovered them up in the forks and rotten limbs of the various Eucalypts in that region. None were as impressive or as large as that first clump however. At what is the southern limit of their range in Australia, these Bega plants were still flowering just before Christmas. Up around Sydney they tend to flower in November to early December. In the bush house situation they will generally be opening by mid to late October. Altitude has a lot to do with *C. suave*'s flowering season of course and even up around the higher regions of southern Queensland it may not bloom until December.



*C. suave* extends from the Bega River up as far as the Cooktown region, a not inconsiderable distribution of 3000 kms. I've never seen it any further north than the Calliope Range, 100 kms short of the Tropic of Capricorn. Even there it is not very common. *C. suave* ranges from absolute sea level all the way up to at least 1,100 metres altitude. Across the 2000 km range that I've seen *C. suave*, from Bega to Calliope, there are no vegetative differences to distinguish them. I've not seen flowering plants from further north than the Border Ranges. Over the whole of the NSW range, no differences beyond the normal colour variations that *C. suave* exhibits has been noticed. It appears that this is a genetically stable species. *C. suave* is an



abundant species in the southern half of its range.



The *C. suave* has found its niche mainly in the hardwood forests, both wet and dry types. The giant stumps left when the loggers leave these forests are certainly rewarding cubbyholes in which to locate *C. suave*.

Occasional specimens of *C. suave* can be seen in strange places. In some paperbark swamps it can be reasonably abundant with its roots finding a happy environment in the loose, spongy layers of that bark. Some specimens are occasionally seen on the trunks of Mountain or Bull Oaks (*Alocasuarina torulosa*). In examples such as these, *C. suave* is definitely growing in a truly epiphytic manner and not just as a stump dweller.

On two occasions I've seen plants growing as true lithophytes on rock with no evidence of an arboreal connection to be seen. The roots were clinging well to the rock surface and appeared to be

doing OK with a diet of leaf litter that had accumulated behind them . . . typical of any lithophytic orchid. Germination may not have occurred on the rock of course. Perhaps these *C. suaves* outlived their ancient, fallen tree limbs long since rotted away. I suspect this would be the case.



The *Cymbidium* genus is a large one with a natural distribution from India to south-east Asia. Three species find their way onto the Australian continent. Besides *C. suave*, we have *C. madidum* and *C. canaliculatum*. As most readers would already know, *Cymbidiums* grow into great clumps of bulbs/pseudobulbs which have any number of flat and wide green leaves attached.

In contradiction to the normal habit, *C. suave* does not have a storage organ, or pseudobulb. Instead it has what the botanists refer to as "woody stems". These stems have very little capacity for water or nutrient storage. The other Australian *Cymbidiums* do have true pseudobulbs. Because it has no storage capacity, *C. suave* bolsters its well-being by only colonising areas east of the Great Dividing Range having reliable rainfall. During droughts, *C. suave* can semi-defoliate and carry on with only the barest number of short green leaves.

In an effort to compensate for this seemingly ridiculous oversight, *C. suave* does grow very fat and very long roots. In hard times, these roots take over some of the functions of a storage organ. It wouldn't be unusual for *C. suave* to grow roots approaching three metres long if the host tree is at the right stage of decomposition. Because of its love for rotting limbs and heartwood, you will often find *C. suave* laying on the ground. And if you are after a piece for your bush house this is the only smart way to obtain it.

If you try and remove a plant from a living tree you are almost bound to kill it stone dead. You will find it next to impossible to dislodge the roots. Usually the woody stems will snap away completely from the roots leaving the would-be collector feeling very sheepish. So save yourself and the orchid the trouble – only pick up plants from the ground . . . there's always a few to be found down there.

If the host tree is big enough, there is not really any limit on how large a clump of *C. suave* can grow. The biggest I know of, down in the Illawarra, is a neat four feet across. It sits about ten metres above the ground in a big old white-trunked gum tree that is still growing along very nicely. That clump cannot get any larger – it already looks jammed solid in what appears to be an old fork in the trunk. There would have to be at least two hundred racemes on board in a good flowering season.

The racemes grow to about 30 cms long and can have up to 30 flowers. These are about 2 cms across and can range in colour from light green to olive green, through to mustardy yellows and on to various shades of woody brown. Some blooms can be a combination of these colours. The flower is rather well filled in and opens up fairly well, although never quite flat. The segments are quite stiff and thick and will snap if bent. The top of the column is a very dark brown colour.

There is a sweet perfume present but it only seems to be noticeable in the middle of fairly hot days. Whatever the pollinator of *C. suave* is, it certainly does a real good job. After the flowering season is over you nearly always find seed capsules on the old racemes. I've seen up to a dozen on a single old spike. On a big clump there could be up to a kilogram of seed pods hanging off like giant green grapes. That's mind-boggling, don't you agree?

Old literature often states that *C. suave* is difficult to cultivate. I can't go along with this. Perhaps they meant to say that it is slow to get growing after the initial potting. I used to go to all the trouble of getting rotten heartwood from stumps and I would not grow my plants in any container under 40 cms in depth. These days I grow it well enough in recycled *Dendrobium* potting mix. That is, the old pine bark that accumulates after I repot anything. It is just a bit far gone for future *Dendrobium* growing but is nowhere near composted into mud.

I throw this re-cycled bark mix in to an 8 to 10 inch (diameter) conventional pot with the same old pebble aggregate in it from the repotting, shove the *C. suave* in with it, place the lot on a bench and forget about it. With a newly collected or repotted *suave*, don't try and save all the old roots. Just cut them all off to about 10 cms long but try hard to keep

any newly emerging roots intact. Potted this way, you can water it along with all your normal potted natives and it won't stay too wet for too long.

If you put your specimen in a big pot of rotten heartwood you'll be forever trying to keep it dry. What happens if it rains too much in the winter time? You stand a good chance of having your prized plant rot away on you, that's what. Unless you have a fiberglass house, Murphy's 48th Law says it WILL rain when you DON'T want it to.

As far as fertilising goes, *C. suave* is one species where you can throw a handful of Dynamic Lifter or blood and bone into the pot without having to worry about clogging up your usual impeccably open potting mix. The added body will actually give this orchid quite a kick along but without the danger of suffering from the perpetual dampness that a deep container full of rotten wood pulp will certainly guarantee.

For some strange reason I've never been able to fathom, *C. suave* – so it is written – has been afflicted with the baffling common name of Snake Orchid. Never have I heard a single native orchid grower refer to it as the Snake Orchid. I assume that some over-imaginative or intoxicated old bushman from last century suffered from a morbid fear of snakes and tried to stone a *C. suave* to death. Maybe an old wives' tale insists that snakes have a habit of hanging out in clumps of *C. suave*. Never seen a snake in a clump myself. I believe I'll carry on just calling it "Suave".

Whatever you choose to call it, make sure you have a plant or two of *C. suave* in your collection and keep giving it lots of TLC. You won't be disappointed, I promise you.

### Three Ages of Cymbidium Suave, A Beautiful Australian Native Orchid

For as long as I know, I have chosen to grow  
In the realm of currawong and crow.  
At home in the trees living life as I please  
As I toss with the moss in the breeze.

At peace here so long, where the Lyrebird's song  
And the chant of the dark men belong.  
My peace was to end and the gloom did descend  
With the raids by the first white men.

The forest they slew as the long fitches flew,  
From the logs in the saw mills that grew.  
The tannin that seeped from the sawdust heaped  
Stained the waters that crept to the creek.

The ancient bush rang as the axes all swang  
Til the giants all fell with a BANG.  
Cymbidiums died and my species has cried  
When loggers loot all in their stride.

A hundred years passed and the slaughter so vast  
Was stalled as the saw mills shut fast.  
The junk from their quest in the forests bereft  
Of a soul in the mess that was left.

But lo and behold . . . who could have fortold?  
The gain from the pain was like Gold!  
The rotting log dumps in the bush sprouted clumps  
Of Suaves reclaiming the stumps.

Cymbidiums now grace the tarted up face  
Of the bush once raped now embraced.  
So soft and so green and so regal a scene:  
Now Heralds the conquering Queen.

Gerry Walsh, 2015

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**Champion Squeezer** - The local bar was so sure that its bartender was the strongest man around that they offered a standing \$1000 bet. The bartender would squeeze a lemon until all the juice ran into a glass, and hand the lemon to a patron. Anyone who could squeeze one more drop of juice out would win the money.

Many people had tried.... over time: weightlifters, Dockers, etc., but nobody could do it.

One day, this scrawny little fellow came into the bar, wearing thick glasses and a polyester suit, and said in a small voice, "I'd like to try the bet."

After the laughter had died down, the bartender said, "OK"; grabbed a lemon; and squeezed away. When he was done, he handed the wrinkled remains of the rind to the little fellow as the crowd laughed. But the crowd's laughter turned to total silence....as the man clenched his little fist around the lemon and squeezed.. and six drops fell into the glass.

As the crowd cheered, the bartender paid the \$1000, and asked the little man: "What do you do for a living? Are you a lumberjack, a weight-lifter, or what?"

The little fellow quietly replied: "Well, no, I work for the Australian Tax Office

**The Bottle Of Wine** - Sally was driving home from a business trips in Northern Arizona when she saw an elderly Navajo woman walking on the side of the road. As the trip was a long and quiet one, she stopped the car and asked the Navajo woman if she would like a ride. With a silent nod of thanks, the woman got into the car.

Resuming the journey, Sally tried in vain to make a bit of small talk with the Navajo woman. The old woman just sat silently, looking intently at everything she saw, studying every little detail, until she noticed a brown bag on the seat next to Sally. "What in bag?" asked the old woman. Sally looked down at the brown bag and said, 'It's a bottle of wine. I got it for my husband.' The Navajo woman was silent for another moment or two. Then speaking with the quiet wisdom of an elder, she said: 'Good trade'.....