



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

(Established in 1947)

A.B.N. 92 531 295 125

21st Aug 2023 Volume 64 No. 8

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

Patrons - Pauline and Trevor Onslow

President : Dennys Angove (Culture Class) 043 88 77 689

Secretary : Jenny Richardson

Treasurer : Lina Huang (and Sales Table)

Vice President : tba

Editor (Hon. volunteer) Jim Brydie

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

Committee Jessie Koh (Membership Secretary / Social Events)

Committee Herb Schoch (Community outreach, Sales Table)

Committee : Chris Wilson (Library and Reference Sources)

Committee : Bill Saunderson (Sales Table)

Committee : Di Flinders

web site (active link) : <http://kuringaiorchidsociety.org.au>

Society email : kuringaiorchidsociety@gmail.com

Next Meeting : Mon 21st August 2023

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

*Attendees must be at least double vaccinated. Please tick your name off the attendance list on arrival & enter 'DV' for double vaccinated if your status has not already been recorded. Face Masks recommended.

The hall is open from 6.30pm to set up the hall (please help), benching can begin from 7 pm but **PLEASE** no benching until all the class dividers and cards are in place. Give the set up team time to get everything organized.

Our Culture class for August will be **David Floyd** on 'Slab culture'. Dave is an ex President and one of our most experienced growers so this is a class not to be missed. Anyone can tie an orchid to a piece of cork but the aim is to make it grow vigorously. -- Remember, bring in a chair from the back of the main hall and take it back afterward.

The usual **monthly raffle**, and the **library** will be operating, and the **sales table** will be open for sale of member's spare plants and for small quantities of pots and other growing supplies. **PLEASE** though, anyone expecting to purchase a larger volume of any one item should contact Dennys in advance as previously explained.

The Supper Break – Our supper Volunteers for **August** are **Bob Taffel & John Hocking**, thank you for helping guys. The society supplies tea, coffee, milk, sugar etc, **but we ask all members to bring in a contribution of cake or biscuits, etc for the supper table. AND - please everyone, bring your own mug.** Also note that Supper is not self-serve, a member is assigned to serve to minimise handling. For those who forget to bring their own mug, we have a few disposable cups but why not put your supper mugs in your car right now.

In place of a 'Guest Speaker' this month, we will be holding an extended supper break to encourage members to socialize and to admire all the lovely benched orchids with your tea or coffee in hand. Perhaps you will see an orchid you have often wondered about? More social time will provide an opportunity to ask a more experienced grower. There will be a few about to ask

Best of the Evening Novice – Cattleya percivaliana grown by **Loretta & Paul Au**



Cattleya percivaliana is unusual for a *Cattleya*. It is largely lithophytic in nature (grows on rock surfaces) although it sometimes grows in trees as well. It comes mostly from Venezuela but apparently some also occur in Colombia.

It is found at altitudes of 1300 to 2000 meters, in full sun, and near rivers and its 25 cm inflorescence has up to 4 flowers which are each about 12cm across.

In its habitat in nature, rain is reduced somewhat in winter, but even then there can be heavy dews, so this is an orchid that despite its habitat never dries out excessively. Rainfall is regular and reasonably even throughout the rest of the year, averaging around 150 – 200mm per month. In cultivation, the experts tell us that you can water and feed it all year, just give it a mild rest in winter.



Its native habitat winter temperatures would only get down to around 12°C but I imagine it will tolerate much lower with some reasonable care.

Congratulations Loretta and Paul. Beautifully flowered and presented as usual. You are proving to be top class growers and we look forward to seeing more of your delightful orchids in the future.

The opinions and recommendations published in this bulletin are those of the authors of the various items. The Ku-Ring-Gai Orchid Society Inc disclaims responsibility for any losses or damages that may be attributed to the use or misuse of any material or any opinion published in this bulletin. The bulletin and its content are protected by copyright and no part of them may be reproduced or re-used without the permission of the author.

Society News (if anyone has a news item, please phone Jim on 9476 3383, or email at jimbrydie@aussiebroadband.com.au)

President Denny's Desk – Our July meeting was attended by 41 people, and 115 orchids were benched. We had a large number of apologies and I hope that all those who are under the weather manage to find fairer winds soon.

Gloria's after-supper culture class on growing cattleyas was very informative with lots of interaction, which was so good to listen to. I thank **Paul and Di and Sonja** for their assistance in preparing the excellent supper table and I also thank **Janine** for helping by selling raffle tickets, I actually, won a prize. I also thank all those members who helped put the tables and chairs away.

St. Ives Orchid Fair – The die is set, and we are in launch mode for the SIOF. The news is that the fair will be opened by the Mayor on the morning of Friday the 18th. The “show” is very important for KOS since it is the only major source of income we have. Remember, setting up our KOS display is a separate activity which occurs on the Thursday before the fair. It is a good opportunity for novices to try and get a nice flower ready for the display and if anyone can help set up the display then get to the showground at 9.00am and look for **Lina**. It can be fun and rewarding so please get involved.

August Supper – Our August meeting is the day after the show, so the committee has decided not to have a post-supper speaker and instead we will extend supper to celebrate the end of the SIOF and give members more time to enjoy the SIOF experience and swap tales of purchases and happenings. KOS will supplement supper with a few goodies so, to make it even more enjoyable, additional supper contributions would be appreciated. It would probably be good to restrict yourself to a light dinner before you come.

Sales Table – Please remember that the sales table does not open until 7.00 pm since it takes some real time to get items set up. Please let the plants arrive at the table. If you are bringing plants in for sale, remember, the focus is on culture items so you may have to initially limit/manage your plant offerings accordingly and bring more in for sale from your vehicle as needed. The pencils and clips have now arrived and should be on the sales table.

Bulk purchase – If you need large numbers of items that we normally stock, please email your requirements to me so I can bring them in as a special order. I only have limited space in my vehicle so therefore, I am limited in the numbers of items I can bring to our meetings.

Expected Purchases – We are getting low on some stock items so we will need to go back to Garden City Plastics for more supplies. We hope to buy some bark for stock to make it a bit easier for members when your bark-need time arrives. Please let us know by EMAIL if you need some bark for this purchase. Bear in mind, last time we picked up the goods from GCP at Somersby, it worked out ok but this means we WILL need volunteers to help out when pickup time arrives.

Supper, Mug and Badge reminder – Please remember to wear your badge and try and bring your own mug for coffee/tea. A contribution to supper is always welcome.

Wearing masks – The wearing of masks in indoor spaces is still recommended by NSW Health. 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. I will continue to wear a mask until I feel it is safe not to.

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.

Other News Items

1. Gloria's talk – It was a pity that some members went home after the break last month because they missed a great presentation and discussion from Gloria, with Allan even pitching in on some points. Gloria not only showed exactly how you go about grooming a Cattleya as its buds are opening, she took questions all along the way and answered all sorts of side queries on Cattleya culture and the way they use peat and perlite as a medium. They talked in very practical terms understood by all and were greatly appreciated. Thank you Gloria and Allan - great stuff.

2. Upcoming events

Fri 11- Sun 13 Aug - National Orchid Extravaganza and Paphiopedilum Society, the Arena Sports Club, Rookwood Rd, Yagoona. Special show for Cymbids, Paphs, and many others. Great displays, many vendors.

Fri 18- Sun 20 Aug - St Ives Orchid Fair, St Ives Showground. See this bulletin for details

Wed 23-Sat 26 Aug - Berowra & District OS show, Westfield Shopping Centre Hornsby

The St Ives Orchid Fair – 18 - 20 Aug - St Ives Showground - Mona Vale Rd, St Ives

Members - We are one of the clubs that run this fair and we also put on one of the displays.

This is your show – We need your Support.

The Volunteer Rosters – The Fair Management committee has assembled a combined roster from shifts volunteered by members of the 4 partner societies and at the fair, managers will use that combined roster for assigning volunteers to specific roles day by day as volunteers check in.

Being the humans we are, sometimes things just don't go to plan and plans change moment by moment. Some turn up late or early, some fail to show up, or make special last minute special requests.

As a result, we don't publish preplanned assignments but be assured, the roster managers have recorded each volunteer's requested specific roles and/or limitations on physical capabilities, and will do their very best to try to accommodate. We ask for all volunteers understanding and flexibility when you check in.

St Ives Fair 2023 Volunteer Rosters (showing Kuringai Orchid Society volunteer shifts only).

**** These tables are published to help remind KOS members about the shifts they have offered**

**** All helpers MUST first go to the entry ticket table at the front door of Vendors Hall.**

You must check in and be assigned separately for each shift you have volunteered.

**** Assigned roles may differ within each shift. You will be given your pass at check in.**

Please note : your requested roles or physical limitations have been considered by roster managers but flexibility is requested.

Thursday 17 th August		Friday 18 th August	
9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 4.00pm	9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 4.00pm
Graeme Mohr (display/setup)	Lisa Harris	Jessie Koh	Trevor Miller
Chris Wilson (both halls)	Loretta Au	Herb Schoch	Penny Prott
Lina Huang (display/setup)	Paul Au	Annie Tao	Pearl Tong
Dennys Angove (display/setup)		Helen Wong	Betty Ng
Janine Angove (display/setup)		Ming Chin	Jeanne Lam
Jon Hestelow (display/setup)		Jon Hestelow (sales table)	Stuart Ruthven
Jim Brydie (display)		Christine Rethers	
Geoff Le Marne		Chris Wilson	
Lewis Matthews		Lisa Harris	
Loretta Au			
Paul Au			
Pearl Tong (vendor's hall)			
Penny Prott (vendor's hall)			

Saturday 19 th August		Sunday 20 th August		Sun. 20 th August
9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 4.00pm	9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 3.00pm	3.00pm to close
Jon Hestelow (sales table)	Jeanne Lam	Helen Wong	Chris Wilson	Chris Wilson
Christine Rethers	Grace Zou	Jon Hestelow (sales table)	Jessie Koh	Paul Au
Mary Matthews	Janine Angove	Christine Rethers	Herb Schoch	Dennys Angove (late)
Trevor Miller			Annie Tao	
Jean Hocking			Ming Chin	
John Hocking				
Bob Taffel				

1. The Ku-Ring-gai Orchid Society Display at St Ives

***** *The following is set out in detail in the SIOF KOS Member Information Pack, but to summaris.***

Set up day is Thursday. We need both flowers and foliage from members AND they need to at the display hall by 9am Thursday 17th Aug. (to enable the team to assess the available material and to begin organising the display)

Plants for our display - We know that many of our members also belong to other societies. Many traditionally support the 'other' society in their displays, **but can we ask even those members to find a couple of plants for us?**

Providing orchids and foliage for our display is entirely voluntary, but the number of members who usually contribute is alarmingly small compared to the number of members who bench every month at meetings. Please members, don't leave it all to others, we especially need your orchids.

Getting them to the show - If you can't get your plants to the show, we may have some limited capacity to transport them for you but we would greatly appreciate it if you can get them there yourself.

If you do need help to get your plants there, please phone Dennys on 043 88 77 689, to see what can be done.

(A) Plant preparation and condition – Plants should be clean, in good condition, and free of pests and diseases. Please attend to any clean up, staking and preparation in the week or more leading up to the show.

(B) Orchid flowers will be judged for prizes – All orchid flowers in the displays are also entered into the show classes set out in the show schedule distributed to members. Because they are separately judged in their classes, we need members supplying plants to fill in a nomination form (already supplied to members) so that we know who owns each orchid and what the orchid's name is. Remember, you may be putting your orchids up to win some prize money for yourself. Try to fill in the form as best you can with at least plant names and your name.

We need your Nom. Form list submitted to Dennys Angove by email at dennys.angove@bigpond.com by 6pm

Tues 15th Aug to enable us to start making the large decorative plant name cards used in the display. When the public admires the displays, the big cards help viewers identify the plants they admire.

- (C) **Marking your plant pots -** You also need to **mark each pot clearly with your name or initials** so that the plant comes back to you. Most of us use small white removable paper sticky labels available from office supply stores. However, a piece of common paper masking tape is also good. **Put your sticker on the back of the pot, away from where the flowers face**, and write your name or initials boldly and clearly. The display pull down process on Sunday afternoon can be a mad-house. Labelled pots help us quickly sort which plants belong to whom.

Best of the Evening Species – *Isabelia violacea* ‘David’ grown by *Garrie and Lesley Bromley*



This is a really delightful little orchid but for nearly all of my orchid growing career it was known as *Sophranitella violacea*. The genus name *Sophranitella* being suggested by Rudolph Schlecter in 1925 as a reference to the tiny size of the plant and flowers that resembled a smaller *Sophranitis*.

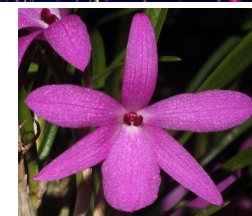
In more recent times, DNA research has shown that there are three closely related species that belong as a genus together as part of a small side clade within the *Laeliinae*. I won't go into detail on its closest *Laeliinae* relatives because for our purposes here it is sufficient to make clear they are part of *Laeliinae* along with *Laelias*, *Cattleyas* and *Epidendrums* etc.

These three sister species we are talking about were originally identified as 3 different genera - one as *Neolauchea pulchella*, one as *Isabelia virginalis*, and the other as *Sophranitella violacea* but they are now all identified as *Isabelia* while retaining their original species names.

Just to introduce you to the sisters, there are pictures of the other two at the right. As you can see, each is a creeping rhizome type of plant that eventually forms a surface cover. Each has small pseudobulbs topped by a single very narrow leaf. The most vigorous by far is *pulchella* (far right) which branches freely and quickly makes a nice specimen if grown in a shallow vanda tray with coarse mix. The other here is the rather curious *virginalis* whose rhizome and pseudobulbs are covered by a loose, hairnet like cover that I suspect has some protective purpose but which may also be involved in capturing dew or mist.



However, getting back to our main subject, *Isabelia violacea* has the largest and prettiest flowers of the three. It also has slightly larger, spindle shaped pseudobulbs even though they measure just 15 mm to 30 mm tall. The pseudobulb has a shortish inflorescence that can carry 3 flowers but 1 or 2 is more usual. The lovely flat, pinkish mauve flowers are usually about 3 cm across but larger flowers are known.



The Charles Baker description in *Orchidwiz* gives the following for habitat : “*Brazil. This species is common in the cooler mountains from the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo southward to Rio Grande do Sul. Plants are also found in the drier savannah country of Minas Gerais. These plants require more light than Sophranitis species, and they tolerate more dryness. Plants are found on both lichen-covered, rough-barked trees and on rocks. Miller and Warren (1994) reported finding these plants in the Macaé Valley, northeast of Rio de Janeiro, growing on mid- to high-tree forks at about 3300 ft. (1000 m). Cassio van den Berg (1996) reported that he has collected these plants near Lavras in Minas Gerais where they were growing at 3600 ft. (1100 m) on thin branches in almost full sun along a mountain stream.*”

Purely as a matter of interest, the first plant of *Isabelia violacea* I bought was from a nursery near Manly Warringah that specialised in importing species orchids from South America. The nursery no longer exists but I recall many happy afternoons trawling his benches in wonderment at the amazingly different orchids for sale there. That plant I bought was growing on a piece of stem from a *Vellozia* plant. *Vellozias*, which are something like a *Dracaena*, are common in Brazil and other parts of South America in the drier, higher areas like those found in Minas Gerais, inland from the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo. I mention this because I am sure my plant wasn't just mounted that way by a seller. It was cut off a live *Vellozia* for sale to an orchid grower so I have always thought of *Vellozia* as another host on which *violacea* grows. For those interested, there is a little more info on *Vellozia* and its habitats in the Oct 2022 bulletin.

However, the only current habitat pictures I could find for *violacea* are these following shots as epiphytes and as a lithophyte. I can't say whether they represent typical locations but they all look relatively dry habitats to me.



Culture : So how do you best grow this little cutie?

Charles Baker's climate charts from Orchidwiz tell us that their natural habitat zone has little average temperature range variation throughout the year. Average lows in winter of about 18°C in the day and 11°C at night and in summer about 24-25°C in the day and 16°C at night. And what is more, the average relative humidity throughout the year is also rather orchid favourable at 73 – 83% all year. I wish our Sydney weather was as kind and mild.

Isabela violacea may tolerate lower temperatures but I always grew this species in my heated glasshouse, hanging on its mount from wires under the roof and dangling along the edge of the centre aisle access pathway. In this location it got regular air flow along the aisle from the fans and it would have experienced minimum winter temperatures of around 10°C. Perhaps its greatest stress period would have been in the summer, when despite my opening up the glasshouse doors at each end (covered in a screen door), and my cranking up the aisle fan, the hot dry summer days would have been rather stressful even though *violacea* seemed to at least tolerate it.

If any of our other members or readers grow this one colder or harder, I would appreciate a few words of wisdom by email. Perhaps I can update the rest of the growers next month?

Congratulations yet again Garrie and Lesley. You are both top class growers and we all delight in seeing your orchids on our benches every month. Please keep it going for us.

Visiting the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens by Dennys Angove

Janine and I have been travelling north for over 30 years to visit family and friends and to just go for a road trip. Some of our friends suggested that we should drop into the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens for a break. As we have become older and need breaks more frequently, this advice has become worthwhile, so, in June we finally visited the gardens and found a useful oasis which we will now visit again.

The gardens are found between Raymond Terrace and the Hexham Bridge on the eastern side of the Pacific Highway in the suburb of Heatherbrae. Once you enter the driveway you have to make a decision about parking since you are met with a barrier. At first it worried me since I

thought we are trapped but, it is benign in the sense that once you park you only have to get a token from the cafe to leave, **and it is free**. Just make sure you drive close to the barrier control pillar to submit the token, I didn't.



particularly useful for those who need wheelchairs or walkers. When we found the orchid area it had a cold growing

From the parking area there is a nice path over to the cafe and services area. The cafe serves simple food, tea, coffee, drinks and such, and it is staffed by volunteers. The scones were exquisite. There is plenty of seating in nice surrounds. When we arrived, there were volunteers everywhere helping and learning, it was a hive of energy. I reckon if I lived up that way, I would also be a volunteer since it gave me a such good feeling to be there.

After lunch, we went for a walk. There are yellow-paved pathways and bush trails. All are easy; however, the paved ways are

area, a shadehouse and a tropical house. The structure of the shadehouse was substantial and well done.



The tropical house had a controlled atmosphere and was well designed to allow folk to move around while keeping the plants protected. Some personal collections I know have many more plants but those that were on display were attractive and demonstrated the

variety of orchids available. Other people were obviously enjoying their visit on account of the many “oohs” that were being uttered.

Surrounding the cold growing shadehouse were high trees with plenty of shade and there were large areas of native orchids planted in the extensive shaded areas. Some were spiking and I expect it will be astounding to walk through this area when the time is right.

After visiting the orchid houses, we went for a walk along the yellow paths and found the cacti and succulent garden. It was amazing and had obviously been in place for a long time.

So, if you need a break or a long day out, I suggest have a think about dropping into the gardens.

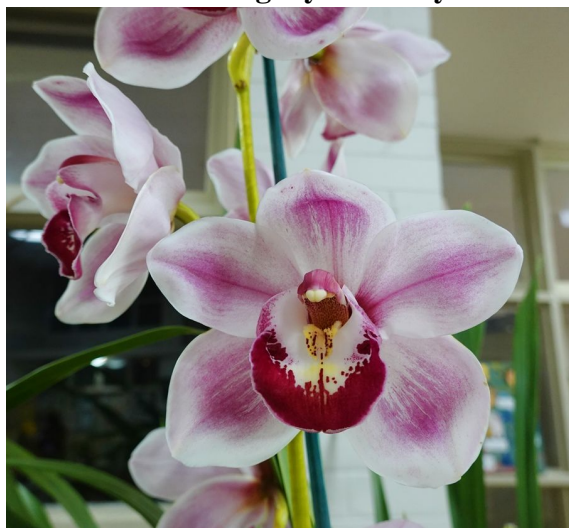


They are a 1 hour 35-minute drive from Hornsby and 3.9 km north of the Hexham bridge, on the right travelling north.

Dennys



Best of the Evening Hybrid – Cymbidium Kimberley Splash x Dural Dream grown by Geoff LeMarne



What a lovely balanced flower, and doesn't the pink 'splash' effect in the tepals show it off so well with the dark edged lip.

I am no guru in the latest Cymbidium breeding so I have to admit up front that my data here is all from Orchidwiz and a bit of early history as a grower.

Kimberley Splash was bred by Peter Sunderland of Kimberley Orchids in Victoria in 2002. Not all of its seedlings came through with that 'splash;' effect in the petals and as often happens in a cross, they aren't all white with pink features. In fact, of the 7 different cultivars shown in the Orchidwiz gallery, only two would fit that description although I am sure there are others. The closest to the pattern in our Best of the Evening orchid seems to be Kimberley Splash 'Tee Pee' which is shown below but we will perhaps never know as parent cultivars are not recorded in the official records.

The other parent, Dural Dream came from Gordon Giles breeding here in Sydney. Gordon's family used to own the great Wondabah orchid nursery near North Rocks but that lovely visiting spot eventually and inevitably fell to the developers for more dense housing options. Gordon however continued his interest in Cymbidiums and continued breeding with his friend Keith Wallace at their nursery in Dural.

Gordon has been one of Australia's greatest and most influential Cymbidium breeders and has produced some stunning improvements in the genre over the years. His article covering parts of that history was reproduced with his permission in our Oct 2017 bulletin. It is a fascinating insight. Orchidwiz records show that 2009, the year Dural Dream was registered, is the last registration under Gordon's name but his breeding goes on and registrations continue now under the name Keith Wallace. I used to catch up with Gordon at the Eastwood society Christmas party each year but since the Covid pandemic turned the world on its head some years back I haven't caught up. I hope he is plugging

on creating new genius combinations.

Dural Dream is Lunar Flame x Flaming Vulcan but despite the word Flame in both names, most Dural Dream's are just pink. There are pictures of three of the best cultivars shown below. What Dural Dreams do have though, is that big, round, heavy textured shape with overlapping segments that is most desired in modern hybrid Cymbidiums. I can only guess but I am thinking that the breeder was perhaps looking for a rounder, more filled in splash petal pink and white flower and that seems pretty much what Geoff showed us last meeting.



Kimberley Splash 'Coral'



K. Splash 'Tee Pee'



-- Dural Dream (in order) 'Supreme', 'Picture', 'Christine' --

A very appealing and attractive orchid Geoff. Congratulations on another worthy Best of the Evening.

The Parrot - Wanda called in a repairman to fix her dishwasher but as she had to work, she told him - 'I'll leave the key under the mat. Please fix the dishwasher, leave the bill on the counter, and I'll mail you a cheque. Oh, and by the way, don't worry about my dog Spike. He won't bother you at all, but, whatever you do, don't under any circumstances talk to my parrot!'

When the repairman arrived at Wanda's apartment, he discovered the biggest, meanest looking dog he has ever seen. But, just as Wanda had said, the dog just lay there on the carpet watching him go about his work. The parrot, however, drove him nuts the whole time with his incessant yelling, cursing, and name calling. Finally the repairman couldn't contain himself any longer and yelled, 'Shut up, you stupid, bl**dy, ugly bird!'

To which the parrot replied, 'Get him Spike!' (Men just don't listen)

Neobenthamia gracilis by Jim Brydie

At our last meeting a grower asked me which class this orchid should be benched in. I was talking to David Floyd at the time but I immediately answered 'Asian species' and the grower popped off to bench it. David quite rightly asked 'isn't it from Africa?' which started a little discussion. David was right of course but at our club so was my benching advice because our species orchid classes are either "American Species" or "Asian and Other" and Africa is of course included in the 'other'. I have to admit that being correct was a bit of fluke because despite growing it I haven't ever bothered to do any research on Neobenthamia and I assumed it was Asian. My ignorance does this cute and easy to grow orchid rather an injustice, so I have decided to right that today.



(cultivated Neo.)



Flowers on Jenny Richardsons plant

Jay Pahl's Internet Orchid Species Photo Encyclopedia tells us that Neobenthamia "... is a monotypic genus (single species) possibly endemic to Tanzania and it grows warm and humid on cliff faces and sloping rock faces either lithophytically or terrestrial. The plants have a grass-like look with a long reedy stem and many leaves that give rise to a terminal inflorescence at 3 feet or more high, and which are induced (to flower) by giving brighter light during the early summer." Orchidwiz now regards Neobenthamia as inseparable from Polystachya and lists the old Neobenthamia gracilis as Polystachya neobenthamia however the original name is still presently the one more commonly recognised among growers so I continue with that name.



(NB : the 'Species Photo Encyclopedia' is a wonderful, free, internet resource tool available to all orchid growers and contains much more than just pictures. It is a genuine orchid encyclopedia)

So, OK, I have to admit that Neobenthamia doesn't quite look as good as one of Gloria's Cattleyas. It has stiff, reedy, sometimes branched stems up to about a metre tall and if you just let it ramble they can sprawl about a bit. However, it doesn't take too much effort to keep it staked while the stems are a bit new and sappy. And if you cut out the dead

stems and those that get a bit too scruffy, the whole thing can quite easily be kept rather attractive.



In nature, on the other hand, clumps can often be just the opposite as the picture at the direct left shows. The plant here is growing virtually as a lithophyte on a rock surface but there also appears to be a patch of shallow soil and compost gathered around its base. This sprawling patch seems to be relatively wide, with dozens of stems, but each stem is much shorter than you would experience growing it as a cultured plant. The picture at the far left is at a different location on the slopes of a steep hillside where it is probably growing in shallow soil and decaying

humus. The stems look a lot taller and more lush. You can also see the dense terminal heads of gorgeous little 2.5 cm white flowers with purple spots in the lip.

Culture : Being a terrestrial/lithophyte you can imagine that this one needs a variation of your standard terrestrial mix. Various growers report success with very different mixes ranging from straight sphagnum moss to garden soil, but the thing to always keep in mind is that it comes from essentially dry areas.

Based on our southern hemisphere seasons its natural habitats would get low rain for 9 months from June through to the following February. Monthly rainfall in this period would vary between 15 mm and 60 mm – definitely rather dry. Rainfall in the other 3 months would be something like March 120 mm, April 350 mm, May 230 mm. A short sharp wet season. AND, all growing locations are highly drained. Either on great wide rocky surfaces or steep hillsides, and always in sun.

One contributor to a site called Slippertalk gives a good insight : ... “It’s indoors this time of year due to the weather, (the grower is in the USA) but this is one of the orchids that always goes out in the summer. They like bright light and warm temperatures. I slowly acclimate it to nearly full sun once it goes out in the spring. Brighter light keeps the growths a more manageable size. I have grown it indoors in years past, and individual growths can exceed 8 - 9 feet in lower light conditions.”

“I grow this in a terrestrial mix of standard potting soil with some bark & large perlite mixed in, though it’ll do fine in pure soil. It’s a fast grower that I have to divide periodically. I usually keep a small piece and get rid of the rest.”

Personally, I (JB) think I used to grow this one in that South Australian Cymbidium mix our society used to get delivered. I don’t think I have a plant any more but today but if I did I would try an open terrestrial mix with added crumbled styrene and jumbo perlite.

As you can see from the picture at the right, a screen snip from an excellent YouTube video by Stephen Van Kampen-Lewis, this species has a large vigorous root system and its roots are of reasonably large diameter. Something like a slightly thinner Cymbidium root. In the video, Stephen explained that he potted this plant in this 150 mm terracotta pot only two years ago and at that time the base of the plant was level with the rim of the pot. The vigorous root development has pushed the whole plant up about 3 or 4 cm. That is root power.

Summing up – use a more or less terrestrial mix, a decent size pot for the size of the plant. I would go to a 200 mm plastic Cymbidium pot next for Stephen’s plant. Grow in as much the sun as you can so long as you don’t burn it to death.

Perhaps avoid the late afternoon sun and heat in mid-summer. Keep the plant moist but don’t drown it as it is nearly an epiphyte. Definitely no saucer of water under the pot.

And as for fertiliser, its habitats would be inherently poor in nutrients apart from perhaps the odd animal and bird droppings. Not that that means *Neobenthamia* wouldn’t respond favourably to regular plant food. Most orchids do. However, I suggest the standard “little and regular” as the plan to start with and work on from there based on observation and judgement, and don’t make changes too quick or too often. Wait and watch.

The final factor to consider is temperature. Their natural habitats are warm all year round but anecdotal evidence says they will tolerate harsher conditions. In the milder parts of Sydney they can stay outdoors all year round. If you experience harder conditions you may have to move it to a more sheltered or protected location. Perhaps against your house which acts as a nice heat sink for what sunshine we do get during the winter.

Where do you get it? -- You mostly find *Neobenthamia* for sale on club sales tables or in auctions because it divides easily and also produces keikis from time to time. It isn’t usually a regular stock item at orchid nurseries but they do list it from time to time. I’m afraid it’s a case of keep your eye out or ask a friend for a piece, but don’t despair, there is a lot of it about.

