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Next Meeting : Monday, 21st March, 2016

Venue : The Lindfield Community Centre, corner of Bradfield Rd and Moore Avenue, West Lindfield.
The Culture Class starts in the front room at 7.20pm. This month Bob Ellis will do another talk on potting Stanhopea, but this time the demonstration will focus on small baskets where the technique can be slightly trickier. If you didn’t go and watch Bob last time, I probably need to tell you than he is an absolute master artist at this basket thing. I am just gob smacked at how easy he makes it look and what an amazingly neat and tidy result he gets. I copy his methods studiously but somehow mine don’t seem to look the same. See if you can figure it out.
The main meeting commences at 8pm. After the tea break, our very special guest speaker will be Jody Cutajar whose topic will be “My Brazilian Orchid Odyssey”. Jody is a wonderful speaker. He has travelled widely and takes terrific pictures and video clips, and never fails to give us an entertaining and information filled evening. With the weather surely cooling a little by March, and more and more orchids flowering, this should be a great night to share our pleasure in orchids.

Our supper volunteers for January are Mary Mathews and Janet Snodgrass. I’m sorry I got it wrong last month girls, but it really is your turn this time. Thank you for volunteering.

Best of Evening Novice – Miltonia clowesii - grown by Yvonne Szeto-Lowe
This lovely species grown by Yvonne has been awarded BOE 3 times in recent years but Yvonne has still never won the annual novice species class. Maybe this will be your year Yvonne, you certainly grow well enough these days.

Miltonia clowesii is from Brazil in the mountains just inland from Rio de Janeiro and north to the coastal Organ mountains. It is generally found at elevations of only around 800 meters but none the less, M. clowesii proves to be a hardy, cool grower in our Sydney climate. Clowesii’s flower spike can be up to 60cm and carry 7 to 10 flowers, opening successively, several open at a time. However, the spike is often shorter and the flowers fewer. The flowers are about 5 to 7cm across and flower quality varies substantially from plant to plant. In my opinion, this one of Yvonne’s is one of the nicest. I don’t have a picture here of the whole massive plant she benchend last month, but it was a beauty, something like 60 or 70cm across with a dozen or more spikes like the one pictured. Magnificent.

Miltonia clowesii is a hardy grower that likes relatively bright light all year round but that doesn’t mean full sun. 50% shade cloth is good so long as your shade house isn’t also affected too much by shade from nearby trees or buildings. It also likes regular water all year round and regular light fertiliser. It is one of a group of about 8 species from Brazil that have similar growth characteristics but quite individual flowers. Other popular species in the group that you might like to try are the big plum flowering M. spectabilis variety Moreliana. The cream to yellow flowered M. flavescens, and the beautiful pink and white M. regnellii (many growers don’t think the latter smells very nice). All are tough, reliable orchids for Sydney conditions and well worth the bench space.

Congratulations on yet another BOE Yvonne. We will surely get you out of Novice soon.

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

1. Pauline’s Recipe – At the culture class last month Pauline promised we would write down her peat and perlite formula for you, so here it is. She uses 5 parts super coarse perlite (not Jumbo), one part Lithuanian Peat Moss, and one part styrene bean bag balls. Please note, it is important that you use the imported European peat moss. It is a very old peat from ancient sphagnum bogs and is very stable. The one sold in Australia at present is from Lithuania but it is much the same as what was bought as “German peat moss” 50 years ago. Other peat products available and sold as Australian peat and Canadian peat are quite different and much less suitable for peat and perlite mixes.

2. Growing Competition - Its time to bring them in again please. In case you have forgotten, the plant is Degamoara Olympica ‘Jacqui Louise’. They were all doing very well last time and we might even have some showing spikes by now. It will be interesting to check their progress.

Remember, we are not keeping a score. There is a lucky draw from among those bench with two $5 sales table vouchers for prizes. Christine Rethers and Jean Fulcher have again kindly agreed to do the reviewing.

3. Welcome to yet another New Member – Nancy Yao has visited us a few times to check things up. I cant find a picture of Nancy, so for now she is just giving us her thoughts.

4. A New Bark Order is open – Please contact Ann Byron (9449 6860) to place your requests. As usual, we buy one pallet of 40 bag of mixed grades (coarse, medium, fine etc) from our supplier. First in best dressed. When we get to the 40 bag total we send off the order and no further requests can be taken. Prices should be around $26 for bark and about $20 for Cymbidium mix. Don’t delay your ordering. Sometimes the 40 bag total fills quickly but we don’t order until we hit 40.

5. New bulletin article competition – This month we have our first entry into this years article competition. Bob Ellis tells us how his love of sport on TV (not) inspired him to submit another entry - “Venturing out into the Unknown”. He is kicking us off with a very entertaining piece. I await entries from all the rest of our members. Articles can be on anything provided it is at least slightly orchid related. It needs to be a minimum of about a half page (including any pictures), up to a max. length of about 2 pages. You don’t need to be an expert – just give us your thoughts. If you can, please send entries to me by email (jimbrydie@bigpond.com) in Microsoft Word format. I will do the editing and formatting, and will work with you to discuss any suggested modifications or tune ups.

6. Membership Fees – There are still a good number of dues outstanding. Please don’t delay.

Orchid dates
20 March – MWOS Public orchid auction, starting 9.30am, Cromer Community Centre, Fisher Rd North
9–10 April – Collectors Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon (opposite RAAF Base)
15-16 April 2016 - Castle Hill Orchid Fair - Castle Hill Showground
13-15 May 2016 - Orchids Out West - Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon (opposite RAAF Base)
5-26 June, Mingara Orchid Fair & Show, Mingara Sports Club
9-10 July 2016 - Tinonee Orchids Open Day and Show - 768 Tinonee Rd, Tinonee (near Taree)
5-7 Aug, National Orchid Extravaganza (Cymbidiums), Dural

Best of the Evening Hybrid – Dendrobium Fraser’s Sulphur Dragon (Leslie and Garrie Bromley)

Well this was surprisingly a pickle to research. It is a cross registered in only 2014 but one clone already has an HCC award and I would be surprised if others didn’t follow, but I couldn’t find a single picture on the internet of two of its key forebears.

The cross is Dendrobium Frasers Green Dragon x Den. canaliculatum. The parents of Frasers Green Dragon are Den. Green Devil and D. discolor. I cant find a picture anywhere of either “Green Devil” or “Frasers Green Dragon”.

What I can tell you is that Green Devil is a mix of 5 warm growing hardcane species from PNG and surrounding areas. All 5 come from Dendrobium section Spatulata which is also known as the Ceratobium group or ‘antelope’ group because many Spatulata species have distinct upright twisted petals that look like antelope horns. Perhaps the dominant species in Green Devil is Den. schulleri (37.5%) which has about 30 yellow to green 5cm flowers on a 30-60 arching inflorescence. I imagine it would be similar to Den. Mary Trowse which has similar breeding (a mix of discolor, tokai, phalaenopsis, and schulleri). Again we are lacking pictures for what would happen when you cross that kind of mix with the huge rambling brown and gold Den discolor to get Frasers Green Dragon, so we will just have to leave that to the imagination.
To reach the final step for Garrie and Leslie’s “Den. Frasers Sulphur Dragon”, you cross Frasers Green Devil with our Australian species Den canaliculatum (see picture at right). This is yet another member of the Spatulata group and seems to be very dominant for shape and colour. The flowers of the Bromleys’ Frasers Sulphur Dragon are larger than canaliculatum, and so is their inflorescence. The flowers are very reminiscent of canaliculatum.

Very little seems to remain of what I am guessing Green Devil must have looked like, but the genes of species like schulleri and antenifera must still be there lurking in the background, waiting to come out in a later generation.

The hybrids featuring Spatulata group species have produced some outstanding orchids, but these are not the easiest to grow in our very temperate conditions in Sydney. They are essentially warm growers from humid lowland areas, and many (but not all) react badly to our cold winter conditions. Experienced growers like the Bromleys bench them regularly so they are not impossible, just not the sort of orchid I would recommend to less experienced growers.

Congratulations on another Best of the Evening Garrie and Leslie. It was just lovely.

**Dendrobium beetles** For the newer members who haven’t heard all this before, you may be wondering what is decimating your Australian native Dendrobiums, so this is to tell you all about the ‘dreaded beetle’. The damage done by the adult beetle is the first thing you will see. Apart from chewed flowers and buds, they generally strip sections of the lamina from developing leaves in a very distinctive way, leaving the woody inner layer of veins intact like a skin.

**Life Cycle**: The beetle is quite distinctive. It is about 12mm long, orange in colour with 4 or 5 black spots on their wing covers that may sometimes appear to be 2 horizontal black stripes. The adult beetle feeds on leaves, flowers, buds, and seed capsules of the orchid. Not just Dendrobiums, but they do seem to favour nice fresh leaves or growths of Dendrobium. They will however eat flowers of just about any orchid – especially Cymbidiums, and they will eat new growths of many others as well. They are especially efficient at destroying all the forming flower buds if not controlled.

After feeding on whatever they have selected, the adult beetle lays its eggs on nearby new growths, buds, and flowers. The eggs are very tiny, elongated and greenish cream in colour. After about 10 days the beetle larvae emerges (see at right) and tunnels into the new shoots, turning them into a soggy mush and to die. While within the cane, the larvae will grow to a length of about 12 mm, by which time they will have eaten out the fleshy inside of the cane.

**Control**: One method of controlling this pest is to ensure that your orchid house is sealed, preventing the beetle from getting in, but this is much easier said than done. Adults are also easily controlled with most insect sprays, but the larvae is more difficult to control. Most poisons that are effective on the larvae are very toxic and still will not control the larvae well. It has been said that the systemic insecticide Confidor will work but I can’t confirm this. Many growers use a regular application of the insecticide Carbaryl. This is a contact spray and so can only kill what it actually hits, but the residual smell of Carbaryl on the plant is reported to act as a deterrent to the adult beetles for some weeks unless it rains. No beetles on your plants, no eggs get laid either, and you really only need to spray the fresh new growths until they mature and harden up.

The adult beetles also have a very interesting defence mechanism that makes them rather easy to catch. If you put your hand (or a finger) near them they ALWAYS fold up their legs and let themselves drop. Their intent is to become lost in the detritus on the ground around the plant, but the trick is to cup one hand under them and then poke them with the other. When they drop into your cupped hand you can set them onto a hard surface and gleefully squash the little so and so’s. Squashing/Stomping is a wonderful, non-toxic, very satisfying control method but if you just don’t have my blood lust, you can always just get them to drop into a cup of water with some oil in it. Oh, and please also note that adult beetles nearly always travel in pairs. If you find one, don’t stop until you find the second one.

If you catch them or spray them before they lay eggs, you don’t have to worry about the larvae, but if you are too late, then beware that the larvae do also strip leaves. Perhaps this is before they go into the phase of burrowing into the stems, I am not sure. I once had a plant of Den. delicatum being massacred on 20 or 30 leaves simultaneously. At first I thought it was adult beetles that I just couldn’t find. The larvae were so tiny that I didn’t even see them until the second or third day. There must have been dozens of them and they made a frightful mess before I figured out what was going on.

Once mature, the larvae makes its way down to the base of the pseudobulb and makes a pupa case of white waxy material similar to toothpaste or styrene spaghetti. After pupation (where the larvae morphs into a beetle) the adult emerges to repeat the cycle all over again.
Best of the Evening Species – Epidendrum diffusum - grown by Jim Brydie

You can already see that these flowers aren’t the size of Cattleya blooms. It’s common name is the mosquito orchid (reminiscent of a cloud of mosquitoes) and it is obviously grown for the impressive mass display of flowers rather than the charm of each single flower. Still, the individual flowers aren’t exactly tiny at about a half inch each (12.5mm), and they do have a certain elegance and charm.

Epi. diffusum is found in Mexico, parts of the Caribbean and Central America, and Venezuela & Brazil. They grow in a variety of situations from sea level up to 1600m. The Bakers data from Orchiwiz describes the habitat as “growing on trees and rocks in thorn thickets, open pine/oak forests, and on trees on coffee plantations.” The plant is quite short growing – no more than about 35cm tall but mostly much shorter. Like all its other “reedstem” relatives, the flower spike extents from the top of the leafy stem. On the Best of Evening plant pictured at the left, the leafy part is only 22cm high. The 4 spikes of the flower cloud extends another 62cm above that. I couldn’t bring myself to try to count the flowers but after a quick count of a couple of branches, I estimate the total at around 3000. And they all open at once.

Plant and flower form varies from plant to plant, as it does with most species. Some taller, some shorter, some green, some with a distinct red tinge. I bought the two I grow when visiting Ray Clements Tinonee Orchids near Taree at his Open day in 2007. I was amazed at the selection of advanced diffusum seedlings he had available. There must have been 500-1000 of them, all only a year or two away from flowering. Like all mad orchid growers, I poked around them trying to find some characteristic that would make the one I might buy that extra special champion. Go on, admit it, you have all done the same. Anyway, I chose two plants. Both were robust and well advanced but one was slightly taller and the stems and leaves were completely green, the other was a shorter grower and had a lot of red tones in the stems and leaves. They were growing virtually side by side so the red pigments weren’t anything to do with exposure to brighter light as is sometimes the case. It seems that at even normal light levels some clones naturally produce more of the anthocyanins that make them look red. If grown in lower light the reds tones might well disappear but I am growing them in very bright conditions and it hasn’t increased the red.

If you look at the diffusum plant, the stems and leaves are short and very stiff, indicating that the plant has evolved in relatively dry, bright, hard conditions. I therefore grow my two diffusums side by side, hanging about 2 metres above the ground from a barbed wire stringer that runs the length of my shadehouse, 2.5 metres off the ground. Where these diffusums hang, they are above all other plants and in the brightest, least humid conditions I can supply. I don’t treat them like a cactus however, they get watered and fertilised at the same time as all the orchids in the shadehouse. Its just that they are in terracotta pots and in a situation that allows them to dry quickly between waterings. The situation seems to suit them because they have thrived there. The ‘red’ clone is shorter and more compact, its flowers are ‘reddish’ whereas the others are green. It also flowers a few weeks later than the green one. This is a rewarding and very easy to grow species. It doesn’t need artificial heat in winter but I do grow it under a roof so I can control water in winter. I suspect it would not appreciate long wet spells when it is also cold. I don’t think it is on any of the local nurseries catalog lists at present but perhaps it is the sort of orchid worth asking about if you are interested. Sometimes they have a few but not enough to list.

Archeology

After having dug to a depth of 10 feet last year, British scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 200 years and published a conclusion that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 150 years ago.

Not to be outdone by the British, in the weeks that followed, an American archaeologist dug to a depth of 20 feet, and shortly after, published a story in the New York Times: “American archaeologists, have found traces of 250-year-old copper wire and have concluded that our ancestors had an advanced high-tech communications network 50 years earlier than the British”.

One week later, Australia’s Northern Territory Times, reported the following: “After digging as deep as 30 feet in his backyard in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, aboriginal Billi Bunji, a self-taught archaeologist, reported that he found absolutely, bugger-all. Billi has therefore concluded that 250 years ago, Australia had already gone wireless.”

Twins

A woman has twins and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named “Ahmal.” The other goes to a family in Spain; they name him ”Juan.” Years later, Juan sends a picture of himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal.

Her husband tells her she didn’t need it. He said, ”They’re twins! If you’ve seen Juan, you’ve seen Ahmal.”
Venturing out into the Unknown ……… by Bob Ellis

I’ve just spent the worst part of January this year watching Tennis on the T.V. My wife loves her tennis, which is good, but she also assumes that everyone else shares her passion. I looked everywhere for the remote control - but to no avail, so I watched that little yellow ball go back and forward, all day and all night, over that damn net, day after day, after day, then week after week, after week until they knew who the winner should be.

Thinking that this may be the norm for the rest of my life I was pleasantly surprised when the phone rang and it was Chris Wilson (from our orchid society) on the other end. Some time ago at one of our meetings I had been talking to Chris about the possibility of him doing a guided walk in the local bush to see native orchids growing in their natural habitat. Chris had rung to enquire if I would like go for a short walk through the local bush to see if there were still orchids to be found. This sounded a whole lot better than watching Tennis so I agreed. We arranged a suitable day, when and where to meet, and after discussing some further minor details, I thanked him for the invite and started to think about what I should start to do in preparation for our walk.

I remembered hearing about people who had gone for walks in the bush and had never been seen again, and about people who had gone for a walk and had died from hunger, or thirst, or from snake bite, and even from heat stroke, so I started to plan what I should take. I got out my large back pack into which I put my compass, all the maps I could find, my survival rations, bottles of water, my GPS, mobile phone, insect repellent, a first aid kit and a few other bits and pieces I thought might come in handy, ... even though we were only going to a little valley trail near Hornsby.

The day arrived and I looked at what I was planning to take, and I asked myself, are you a man or just paranoid - I decided to leave it all at home. I gave the wife a peck on the cheek, got into the car and headed off to meet Chris at the agreed location. Chris was already there waiting, and after applying some insect repellent we both headed off down a nearby fire management trail. The weather was fine and sunny and with the sun light filtering through the tall trees and onto the ferns and undergrowth. I quickly forgot that I was in suburban Sydney. A short distance into the bush, Chris yelled out to me “Stop …. Don’t move”. Fearing the worst and that Chris may have seen a snake, I froze, balancing on one leg and with one foot in the air. He then calmly told me that I was about to step on a Cryptostylis erecta. To the untrained eye, a person walking in the local bush may find it hard to notice many plants, especially the ground orchids.

With Chris’ help, I was now able to see what we had come to find, and before long I was even starting to see Orchids that Chris had missed. Progressively, as we strolled further along the fire trail, and onto some of the side tracks, we started to find and see more and more orchids which were growing on rocks, on trees and in the ground. The majority were not in flower, but in addition to the Cryptostylis (which was in flower) we saw Cymbidium sauve, Dockrillia linguiformis, Liparis reflexa, and Bulb. exiguum.

Our little local walk took us through pristine Bush which had flowing creeks, lush and green vegetation, and forests with tall straight trees. It involved some slight climbing up hills and over some rocks but the fire trails and tracks were never hard to traverse. We spent about three hours overall from start to finish, strolling and walking along fire trails and tracks that form part of the Great North Walk and it was quite surprising what was growing out there in the suburban bush around the Hornsby area. To those who would like to do the same type of walk and see orchids growing in their natural habitat I’m sure that if you spoke to Chris, and if he has the time, he would be more than willing to take you into the local bush around Hornsby and open your eyes as to what can be found.
Coelia (syn Bothriochilus) macrostachya by Jim Brydie

Did you notice this lovely orchid benched at our last meeting? It just happened to be mine, but that isn’t why I decided to tell you more about it. For years I have grown and admired this orchid and its other commonly available sister species (Coelia bella). They seem to grow quite well for me but I must admit that for some reason I haven’t found them easy to flower. That doesn’t mean much of course, there are lots of orchids I struggle with that others flower perfectly well, and while I have waited to flower my Coelia, I see them benched at society meetings fairly regularly. Growers seem to greatly admire them whenever they see them, but in the 13 years I have been doing our bulletin, the genus has never managed a mention.

The genus Coelia is recognised as having 5 species these days although 4 of them have been moved from Coelia to Bothriochilus and then back again. The only one that always stayed Coelia was C. triptera which is quite a lovely species itself, but I haven’t seen it benched for many many years, and for this article I will stick to the two more available species. This group of orchids come from the huge Tribe of Epidendraceae which makes them related to some group names you might have heard (Laeliinae, Sobraliinae, and Arpohyllinae, and even Pleurothallidiinae), but they form their own little subtribe of one genus and 5 species called Coeliinae. But that’s enough taxonomy for one night. The point is just to let you know that these orchids are from the Americas as opposed to Asia/Africa/Australia and Pacific Islands, and that they are more or less related to Epidendrums and Cattleyas but not too closely related.

**Coelia macrostachya** comes from Mexico and down through much of Central America to Panama. The elevations at which it occurs are given as 500m to 2500m but most reports seem to be between 1500 and 2100m. Unusually for an orchid, it occurs in a variety of situations as either a terrestrial, a lithophyte, or even as an epiphyte in trees, all of which makes it very difficult for us to make assumptions about how we should grow it. The plant has tightly clustered pseudobulbs about the size and shape of a large hens egg, but the pseudobulb extends up at the top into a stem shape growth that flares out to become the leaves. The overall plant structure looks more like relative of a Cymbidium than anything else.

The inflorescence is a separate growth that comes from the base of a newly emerging pseudobulb. The total length is about 60cm but the flowers occur of a crowded 20-25cm cylindrical raceme at the top. There are hundreds of delightful little crystalline pink and white flowers, sort of tubular in shape, with a distinct sack shape bulge at the rear. They are about 1cm wide by 1.5cm deep and the flowers on the raceme commences opening open from the base with at least half open at once.

I have grown C. macrostachya in a bark mix combining medium bark and Cymbidium mix, but I have also grown it quite well in peat and perlite. I don’t think it is all that fussy provided it get regular water but doesn’t sit wet too long. A few books I consulted seem to agree that this is one orchid that doesn’t like to be disturbed too much so it might be best to use a mix like peat and perlite that doesn’t degrade so quickly and can go longer between repotting. I haven’t figured out what makes it flower one year and not the next but I suspect that it needs decent light and a slight rest during winter, both of which would be consistent with the habitats I have seen reported. I grew it in my shadecover for many years when I had 70% shadecloth over the roof and I didn’t see a single flower while it was in there. It flowered beautifully this year after I moved it out to a bench in the open, outside the glasshouse, where it is brighter and gets just a very short period of early morning sun. Once I start to flower it more regularly I will know more, but perhaps at the next meeting we might get some of our other experienced growers to tell us what they do.

The other species we often see is **Coelia bella**. A very similar looking plant, but with shorter spikes and fewer, larger, and more individually beautiful flowers. The flower spike is only about 15cm including the flowers and there are generally around 6 flowers per stem. Each flower is around 4 to 5cm natural spread, pearly white with mauve tips and a lime to yellow lip. Stunning colours.

This one comes from just Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala, in rainforests, and between 500-1500m elevation. They are either epiphytes or terrestrials, but where they are terrestrials it would be on steep sloping hillsides in deep leaf litter. Culture is the same as for macrostachya.

Neither of these lovely orchids are likely to be found in the average orchid nursery catalog, but they grow easily in Sydney and divisions must sure come up from time to time on society sales tables. Keep your eye out – both are really worth a place in your collection.