Next Meeting : Monday, 19th February, 2018
Venue : The Lindfield Community Centre, corner of Bradfield Rd and Moore Avenue, West Lindfield.

Our Culture Class starts at 7.20pm. This month Bob Ellis will show you how to line a Stanhopea basket with the right kind of paperbark. This follows on from Chris Wilson’s talk last year when he showed members how to make the wire hanging baskets themselves. Bob is an absolute guru when it comes to all things Stanhopea and he a little shy about talking in public (or so he tells me) so this is a rare opportunity to hear his wisdom. Don’t miss out.

The main meeting commences at 8pm. After the general meeting, the judging, and the tea break, our guest speaker will be Chris Nidagal who will talk to us about those wonderful, strange, lovely orchids called Lycastes. After being attracted to this wonderful genus by some of the spectacular examples we sometimes see at meetings, Chris decided to master their culture and boy, did he do it. This guy can grow Lycastes. Hopefully, after his talk, we might all do better with them than we have previously. Thank you Chris.

Our supper volunteers for February are Gloria Cushway and Jennie Richardson. (Does that mean we get rock cakes this month Gloria? Pretty please?).

Best of Evening Novice – Wilsonara Bonne Nuit - grown by Lisa Harris
This is a really nice, hardy as hell orchid, but I am afraid that, about the most interesting thing about it is that it is one of the many, many wonderful orchids bred by the Eric Young Foundation on Jersey Island in the UK. I have never been there but Ian Chalmers has given many presentations on his visits there and it really looks like a place to put on your orchid bucket list if you have one.

The man made genus name Wilsonara is invalid these days because it is defined as an Odontoglossum x Oncidium x Cochlioda. Recent taxonomic changes say that although most may think Odontoglossum species look significantly different to Oncidiums, all Odontoglossums are genetically really just Oncidiums. And in addition, the gorgeous little orange/red flowered orchid we used to know as Cochlioda noezlianum, is also just another Oncidium. Hence Lisa, the correct name for your orchid is Oncidium Bonne Nuit. (in case you didn’t already know, ‘Bonne Nuit’ is French for ‘Good Night’).

There are many different species in the make up of Bonne Nuit but as O. sphecalatum was a direct parent in the primary cross itself, it represents 50% of the genes and has clearly been a dominant factor in many of its characteristics.

O. sphecalatum occurs from Mexico all the way down to Venezuela. I don’t have a lot of habitat information but it occurs as an epiphyte and occasional lithophyte, generally below 1000m. Although that might sound like a warm growing background, all the experience here in Sydney is that this large growing, big flowering orchid easily tolerates our winters and despite its forest origins, seems to demand a growing location with very bright light. If it doesn’t get sufficient light its growth is straggly and flowering is problematical. Hardly incidentally, these are also features exhibited by Bonne Nuit.

I have no specimen pictures of Bonne Nuit but while it might be a bit smaller overall, it should have something like the potential of this picture of sphecalatum off the internet.

Congratulations on a worthy best of the evening Lisa.
Let's get this show on the road: please come quickly to the benching and please come in plenty.

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

1. Benching - An request to all members who bench orchids – Please, please, don’t try to bench your orchids until the benching marshals have finished getting all the Benching Class cards, and the green spacing sticks fully laid out.

I know you are anxious to get your plants out as quickly as possible and then get on with whatever other business you have, but when members put plants on the tables before the marshals have arranged the spaces, it usually means they just put them where they think they should be and then walk away. This ends up with the marshals having to move large numbers of orchids from one place to another, and to rearrange the positioning of large numbers of orchids. This is WORK THEY SHOULDN'T NEED TO DO. Remember – they are volunteers not slaves.

2. Vale Bob Toombs – After the last bulletin went out, I was so sad to hear that Bob Toombs had passed away on 2nd January 2018. We emailed funeral details to our members but it had missed the January bulletin. I wasn’t able to attend personally, but I know several of our members attended to pay their respects.

Eastwood was Bob’s main society but he had also been a member at Kuringai for around 30 or more years and was a great contributor – from helping at meetings, to doing talks for us, and always helping wherever he could. I first met Bob through my fellow committee member Ron Hood in my early days on our committee. Ron and Bob had both worked for Automatic Totalisators and were good friends. Ron introduced me to Bob and I never met a nicer man.

Ron passed away some time ago, and now Bob has gone. Time is not a kind master. We will miss you Bob.

3. Society Social Outing – President Kevin has proposed a late March lunch/picnic at Crosslands reserve in Hornsby, and a bushwalk along Berowra Creek to see what orchids we can find. The date proposed is Sun 25th March. We are presently trying to book one of the shade pavilions in the picnic areas. Crosslands is accessed from the end of Sommerville Road in Hornsby Heights and the access road takes you from the top of the ridge that is Sommerville Road, right down to the upper reaches of Berowra Creek (the body of water crossed by the car ferry at the back of Berowra and which empties into the Hawkesbury River basin). It is still a substantial waterway at Crosslands and if you have a mind to, you could quite happily go for a swim down there. Crosslands is a quite large, picturesque, and historic camping/picnic site. The last time the society went there we found several species of epiphytic orchids and a larger number of terrestrialstrials. For the latter however, what you find it depends on the time of year you go there.

Kevin will discuss the outing at the next meeting to see how many members might be interested to join the group.

Advance Diary Dates 2017

17&18 March (Sat/Sun) Orchid Workshop Weekend – see http://eurobodallaorchidclub.webs.com/

Sun 25 March – Kuringai Orchid Society outing to Crosslands (see above)

7&8 April (Sat/Sun) Collectors Plant Fair – held at Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon Rd (see web)

Fri18 to Sun 20 May – Orchids Out West Orchid Fair – displays and sales, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon Rd

Thu27- Sun30 Sept - the proposed combined Berowra and Kuringai Orchid society’s show at Hornsby

Sun 12 Nov - Manly Warringah OS, public orchid auction - Community Centre Fisher Rd North, Cromer


Best of the Evening Hybrid – Clowestum Jumbo Apollo - grown by Garrie and Lesley Bromley

Can you believe that Bromley character – benches a weird, alien, but fantastic looking orchid and then stands out the front saying he doesn’t really grow these things but he sort of had this one pressed on him so he gave it a home. I have been trying to grow these kinds of orchids for years – I give up. I think I will sell them all.

Clowestum is a man made genus created for hybrids comprising the natural genera Catasetum and Clowesia. These two genera are both members of the subtribe Catasetinae so they are quite closely related, but there are significant differences between them. Garrie’s Clowestum Jumbo Apollo is an “f1” hybrid between two species – Catasetum fimbriatum and Clowesia russeliamum.

There are about 176 species of Catasetum. They occur from Mexico in the north, to the far south as Argentina in South America. They are deciduous orchids which means they drop their leaves around late autumn and don’t commence a new growth, with new leaves, until late spring or summer. It is not winter cold that causes this deciduous pattern, it is that there is significantly less rain over this period. It is hard to generalise to cover the whole genus but if we look at the species fimbriatum which one of Jumbo Apollo’s parents, we find that it comes from areas that don’t get a lot of rain at any time of the year. Based on southern hemisphere seasons, January is the highest rainfall month at a mere 15cm of rain. The previous month, December is the second highest month at 12cm. May through September are the low months at 6, 7, 5, 2 and 5cm but even during this period there would be some overnight dews to help the plants from shrivelling too much.
One of the most ‘different’ features of Catasetum is that they produce separate male and female flowers, and in most cases these look nothing like one another. Each plant is capable of producing either male or female flowers, or even sometime male flowers that have no sexual parts. Which they choose to produce is usually based on environmental factors. For example, plants grown in very high light conditions tend to produce female flowers. Those in more moist shady conditions tend to produce male flowers. As a male myself, I can not be surprised to tell you that it is the male flowers that are far more attractive. Pictures of Catasetum fimbriatum male and female flowers are shown at the right. In male flowers, the pollen is retained by a spring mechanism. When the pollinator disturbs one of the release arms, the pollen is ejected with great force, sticking it firmly to the pollinator (a Euglossine bee) and at the same time subtly suggesting to that bee that it ought to move on and try another flower.

Catasetum fimbriatum

The other genus – Clowesia, also are deciduous, winter rest orchids but these always produce flowers that have both male and female parts. (like most other orchids). However, these orchids do have a special mechanism to help prevent self pollination. No flower can not be pollinated until the pollen has been removed from the flower. After the pollen is removed, the column straightens and raises back from the lip to expose the stigma for pollination. Clever eh?

The parent in Jumbo Apollo is Clowesia russelliana. This lovely species occurs from southern Mexico to Venezuela at the top of South America. It occurs in fairly dry forests at only moderate elevations. Orchidwiz gives the average monthly rainfall as a high of only 17.5cm (in March) and shows a 6 month dry spell (May through Oct) with monthly rain tallies between only 4cm and 0.5cm - much even dryer than the Catasetum fimbriatum habitat. The pendent 30 to 60cm inflorescence carries 20 to 30 or more very pretty 5cm green and white flowers. Quite a sight. I have never grown any Clowesia species, let alone the lovely russelliana, but borrowing from an article “Catasetum and their Kin” by Sue Bottom from the St Augustine Orchid Society in Florida - (Sue kindly allowed me to include it in last years April bulletin) Sue says : “The large flowered Clowesia species include Cl. russelliana, thylaciochila, dodsoniana and glaucoglossa. These you grow similarly to Catasetums. They have long pendent, fragrant, greenish flowers that typically bloom in the summer while the plant is in active growth. You'll follow the same repotting practices as with Catasetums, repotting during the time between when they go dormant and when the new growth begins. You may keep more of the clumping pseudobulbs in the same pot only separating them when the pot would have to be too large.”

In regard to Sue’s comment “grow them similarly to Catasetum”, at our last meeting Garrie mentioned the famous story Fred Clark told when he did a talk at our Society in August 2010. That was about a grower who was very disappointed when she thought her Catasetum had died when it gradually lost all its leaves and was just a pot full of dried bulbs tightly covered in papery bracts. Intending to throw it away, she temporarily put the pot on the floor behind the piano (or was it the lounge? I am not sure but it doesn’t really matter). Of course she promptly forgot all about it until many, many months later. When she found the pot behind the piano (or lounge) she was surprised to find a big new healthy shoot commencing so she put it back among her orchids and in due course it flowered again. The moral here is that once Catasetums (or Clowesia russelliana) go into their deciduous winter rest, the best thing you can do is put them away where you won’t water them or fiddle with them. If they need a repot, wait until the new growth begins, and then wait some more until it just starts to show a set of new roots at its base, and then carefully repot without damaging any of the new root tips, or for that matter any of the old roots either if you can. Most of us find that the latter is nearly impossible but we try.

I don’t grow Catasetums or their relatives anywhere near as well as Garrie (or Sue). These orchids have a short, fast growth period when you need to give them food, water, and light in just the right proportions, and timed properly, to get maximum potential growth. Some seem to master these requirements easily but I am not one of them - mine do grow, but nowhere as well as they could. I still have my “L” plates on and they have been on f...
Best of the Evening Species – Phalaenopsis speciosa grown by Jim Brydie

What a cute little curiosity this is. Sometimes it flowers with nearly all purple coloured segments, at other times it will have the occasional white petal or sepal as you see here. I believe that it may also occasionally be predominantly white with just some purple, but I haven’t seen this particular clone do it yet.

The quandary facing growers in modern times is whether plants that are readily obtainable as Phal speciosa these days are really that species or whether they are its close sister species Phal tetraspis. This ‘other’ species comes from the same geographic area as speciosa although slightly different habitats. Apart from a few small differences they looks pretty much the same, and each exhibits the same odd characteristic of being unstable in flower colour – both among flowers on a single inflorescence, and between flowerings in different seasons. Many modern taxonomists regard the two species as synonymous but others claim they are still separate.

Speciosa and tetraspis are endemic to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, part of a long narrow chain of islands which string out north of the main Indonesian Island of Sumatra. (see map)

In Orchidwiz, although they are listed and described as separate species, it gives us exactly the same habitat information for both speciosa and tetraspis. ie., ‘This possibly extinct species was found on mangroves in muddy swamps. Plants hung from large branches just a few feet above fresh water creeks, fully exposed. The localized population was decimated by over collecting and all records are historical. In 1980 Herman Sweet [author of the book “The Genus Phanaenopsis”], and in 2001 Eric Christenson [taxonomist and author] were neither able to locate any specimens in cultivation, and their studies were conducted using a series of historic specimens preserved in herbaria and a few published drawings.’ - I think Orchidwiz has it slightly wrong.

The description above is correct for tetraspis, with the added information that the places where it grows are quite shaded – such as to being relatively dark.

Regarding Phal speciosa - In a report written for Gardeners Chronicle in 1887, E.S. Berkely who collected large numbers of speciosa and tetraspis and sent them to England (as separate species based on their original descriptions of the time), wrote “this plant does not grow in Mangrove swamps, it grows on large trees fully exposed to air; this will probably account for it being more robust. It can in cultivation stand a lot more light than tetraspis, probably as much as any other Phalaenopsis.” Other references also confirm that it is not so particular about only growing where there is fresh water. One says “it occurs on exposed trees and within the influence of the salt breezes from the sea.” (Incidentally, and rather sadly, about 98% of Berkely’s shipments of these species died in transit.)

The argument over whether these should be regarded as one species is still not finally resolved but from all I have read, a lot of the differences between them in the original descriptions were based on colour and that to me that seems to go against all my previous understanding about colour being unacceptable in species differentiation. There are also supposed to be subtle differences in lip shape and form, and of course the slight differences in the habitat, but these seem dubious for separation, especially given that the descriptions were based on very limited samples of different individuals, and in some case were based on either pickled or dried specimens.

All in all I am inclined to say they are synonymous but for the moment at least I have left my labels as they were.

I haven’t been growing these species all that long. I have always admired the quirky colour patterns, so when I saw both species for sale as seedlings at one of the fairs, I bought a few of each. They are beginning to increase in size and show off a few more flowers as they get older and stronger but they are still quite smallish plants. For some reason I had always assumed that they were inherently small plants and that was all I could expect of them. Imagine my surprise when in researching this piece, I found the following various old descriptions:

On Phal speciosa – (a) ES Berkely in Orchid Review “I once measured a flower spike of one of these over 6 foot (180cm) in length. It is a plant that has grand branching spikes in its native home, and varies much in the colour of the flowers, ---- (b) by Rolfe, in an 1893 Orchid Review comment on a plant in the Clare Lawn collection of F Wiggins in the UK “P. speciosa and its variety Imperatrix grow and flower profusely. The latter, which has 9 leaves, some over a foot long (30cm) and 5 to 6” wide (up to 15cm),” (c) and in another publication by ES Berkely: “I have just been into the Orchid house and measured the largest leaf of one of the finest varieties – It measured 19 inches.” (about 47cm)

On Phal tetraspis – by ES Berkely “We have not yet seen large plants of it as large plants do not travel. But it is truly a beautiful plant in its native home. I myself saw in the South Andamon a plant which was many years old, the main
plant bearing leaves which were quite three feet long. This plant had a progeny of children growing on the old flower stems and these plants had in turn produced other flower stems which were also bearing plants. The whole plant was a mass of blooms, the plant, the children, the grandchildren, all blooming at the same time. There were certainly at least one hundred spikes all flowering at the same time on practically the same plant. The plant was quite a sight and as I did not gather it, I on several occasions took parties of officers up the creek to see it.”

Hmm, it seems I have not exactly growing these species to their potential. Looks like I had better lift my game.

What a fascinating pair of species. You could grow a whole collection just between them.

Although I admit that my proud culture is a little short of the mark, I give my practices for what they are worth. - I grow these in the glasshouse, in sphag moss in smallish pots, hanging from the roof glass above the side benches., I try to keep them moist but not soaking wet. I sometimes fail however, and from time to time they will get way too dry and probably even wetter than they really want. Despite this, they seem to be fairly forgiving. When I let them down with my omissions I must know that I am doing my best for them and they hang in there anyway.

I use a siphon/proportioner device for all my fertiliser application and I aim to supply somewhere around half strength soluble fertiliser about every second or third watering. Unfortunately, as with the watering, life keeps getting in the way and it is more likely about every fifth or sixth time. I know they could use more but I comfort myself with the thought that it is better to underfertilise than overfertilise. Which is true of course, but it isn’t very convincing to the ego when you know you just didn’t do it right.

However, now that I know what I am potentially missing out on, I am very confident that I will do better in the future. Just think, 3 foot long leaves, 100 spikes, and hundreds of flowers on one plant, ... Wow. Let me see now, the leaves on mine are about 6 inches at present, I think another 20 years should be enough to do it. Is that all?

**The Gardener’s Chronicle**

by Jim Brydie

In the above discussion on Phal speciosa/tetraspis, I mention information published in the historic publication “the Gardener’s Chronicle”. I wonder how many members have heard that name before or know its significance in the history of all horticulture, let alone our favourite plants - the orchids.

The Gardener’s Chronicle began in 1841 and continued under that name in one form or another for 150 years. Even after that it has still continued as part of the magazine Horticulture Week. When it started it was published weekly in broadsheet newspaper form. It cost 6 pence and contained both national and foreign news, as well as a large amount of advertising and horticultural information, including material about orchids. It wasn’t long however before it dropped the general news section and concentrated only on horticultural subjects. Don’t forget that in those early times gardening and horticulture was strictly an interest of the rich and well off. The Chronicle had a circulation of 6500 by 1851, a huge number in those times and greater than many eminent newspapers of the day.

The Gardener’s Chronicle was founded by the famous horticulturists Joseph Paxton and John Lindley, politician and keen gardener Charles Wentworth Dilke, and also the printer William Bradbury. John Lindley, who was the father of modern orchid taxonomy, was also the first editor. Other regular famous name contributors were Charles Darwin and Joseph Hooker, and many of the explorer/collector/plant hunters.

Whenever you research anything about the history of orchids, you can’t help but come straight to the names Lindley or Paxton or Darwin or Hooker. The period of the mid 19th century was the peak of orchidmania. New orchid species were arriving in Europe by the thousands every day and the cataloging and description of species as new or known was in chaos. John Lindley was professor of botany at University College London and also assistant secretary of the Horticultural Society of London. He was just the right kind of organised and scrupulous scientist to take up the task of controlling names, eliminating duplications, and reviewing the whole orchid family. In 1826 he published a review of the family that identified 8 separate tribes of related groups of genera. Between 1830 and 1840 he also published a work called “The Genera and Species of Orchidaceous plants” which is still respected today.

His co-founder of the Chronicle, Joseph Paxton, must also have been a very amazing man. Born in 1803 into a family of agricultural labourers, he entered the services of the Duke of Devonshire at a young age and went through a meteoric rise. At the age of 23 he was appointed Head Gardener and was eventually appointed manager of all the Duke’s estates. Eventually, he not only advised the Duke on horticultural matters, but on all manner of things and became the financial adviser who made many decisions for his master who had become more and more involved in
politics and matters of state as the Lord Chamberlain and Privy Councillor. Paxton later received a Knighthood, a privilege which in those days must have been staggering for a man of lowly birth. Paxton built a number of conservatories on the Duke’s estate (Chatsworth), one of which, ‘The Great Stove’, was the largest to have ever been built at the time. It was 300 feet long x 145 feet wide x 60 foot high. He was also the winner of a competition to design and build the Crystal Palace, an enormous and famous glass structure which was used to host the “Great Exhibition” of 1851. He had a passion for orchids and grew all the Duke of Devonshire’s huge collection of orchids and other tropical plants – the largest collection in the world at that time. Paxton was also responsible for the idea of dividing a heated glasshouse into three separated climate zones of warm, intermediate, and cool, to try to better meet each plants requirements from its native habitat. He later became editor of the Gardener’s Chronicle.

Like most publications, the Chronicle was a mixture of advertisements and informative articles but with the mad fervour of orchidmania, I am sure that both the info and the adverts were devoured by the readers looking for opportunities to buy that new species or latest fancy hybrid Hollyhock. There also ads for all kinds of gardening and horticultural equipment - lawn mowers, seed sowers, glasshouses, and even Wardian cases (mini-glasshouses for those without the money or space for a full size one). There was everything you could imagine. Many orchids were traded by regular auctions which mostly took place in London and I imagine that the Chronicle was the ideal place to advertise what was coming up and when it was to be sold. In addition, Paxton specialised in designing and making glasshouses and it is believed that he made a tidy income from the structures he advertised in the Chronicle.

However, despite all the fascinating advertising, which can still be seen online if you have a mind to look for it. (see reference 5 below), the Chronicle was also the major vehicle for taxonomists like Lindley, Hooker, Reichenbach, and later Schlechter, and others, to publish descriptions of new orchids they had found in the wild. Some of the famous plant hunters or collectors also wrote up descriptions of the exotic places they had visited and the habitats in which they had found new orchids. In many case though, as these write ups were designed to increase interest in some new orchid or plant that would soon be becoming available, it was common for them to deliberately lie about where they had found them as location information was worth a fortune for any valuable plant. The expeditions of these hunters were nearly always funded by the huge British or European orchid and plant nurseries. For example, in about 1886, it is reported that Frederick Sander, who owned a large orchid farm in St Albans, England with 60 greenhouses in which to store and cultivate the tropical plants, employed 23 orchid hunters across the world.

Big money being made by the few, and as we know this often resulted in wild populations being decimated to extinction in a just few short years. If there a positive side, if you could possibly interpret it as positive, the orchid family was introduced to the world very quickly. Popular interest has eventually led to the mass artificial propagation of orchids in laboratories and has seen the gradually control of the mass destruction of wild populations. Now if only we can stop destroying their habitats as well..... Perhaps in time.

References:
1. article at - https://parksandgardensuk.wordpress.com/2016/05/28/150-years-ago-this-week/
2. Wikipedia
3. “The Orchid in Lore and Legend” a book by Luigi Berliocchi
4. “The Orchids – Natural History and Classification” a book by Robert Dressler
5. digitised copies of the “Chronicle” at - https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000047643

The Engineer who went to Hell
An engineer dies and goes to Hell. Dissatisfied with the level of comfort, he starts designing and building improvements. After a while, Hell has air conditioning, iced water, flush toilets and escalators, and the engineer is a pretty popular guy.

One day God calls and asks Satan, “So, how are things going down there?”

Satan says, “Well as a matter of fact things are going great. We've now got air conditioning, iced water, flush toilets and escalators, and there's no telling what this engineer is going to come up with next.”

God is horrified. “What? You've got an Engineer? That's clearly a mistake – he should never have gone down there! You know all Engineers go to Heaven. Send him up here immediately!”

Satan says, “No way, I really like having an Engineer on the staff. I'm keeping him.”

God says, ”Send him back up here or I'll sue you.”

“Yeah, right,” Satan laughs, “and where do you think you are going to get a Lawyer?”

The Old Days
Do you remember when you used to get into bed and fall straight asleep, stay asleep all night, and wake up next morning with that awesome feeling, refreshed and ready to take on the world? – Nah, me neither.

The things that come to those who wait, might just be the things left over by those who got there first.