



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

(Established in 1947)
A.B.N. 92 531 295 125

March 2020 Volume 61 No. 3
Annual Membership : **\$15 single, \$18 family**

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Next Meeting : Monday, 16th March, 2020

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

The hall is open from 6.30pm. Please try and get there early to help set up tables, chairs and lighting.

Benching is available shortly after 7pm but please be patient and wait until tables and dividers are in place. Our **Culture Class this month** will be Trevor Onslow demonstrating “*Repotting and Culture of Sarcophilus*” starting at around 7.20pm in the back room. A very timely topic given that this month we will be starting a new Society Growing Competition featuring a *Sarcophilus*. See Page 2.

The main meeting **commences at 8pm**. After the formalities of the general meeting, the judging, and the tea break, the guest speaker is **Jim Brydie** who will tell you “*All about Calanthes*”. This is an unusual genus of quasi terrestrial orchids, with big, long plicate leaves. Something new to learn about.

Our **supper volunteers for February** are **Mary Mathews** and **Lisa Harris**. We all thank you for helping out.

Best of the Evening – Species - *Paphiopedilum parishii* grown by **Jim Brydie**



This lovely orchid has been BOE many times but I keep bringing it because there are always new growers at our meetings. To avoid boredom, the write up is brief. The species comes from Myanmar, Thailand, and SE China, where it is found at about 1200-2200m elevation. It is obviously one of the multiflowered, slow growing group of Paphs, but it is a little different in that it is one of the few of the genus that grow mostly as a true epiphyte, often occurring high up on large trees in association with ferns.

It's natural habitat undergoes a very sharp reduction in rainfall for 6 months from April through October, and monsoonal type rainfall from November to March. (months expressed based on southern hemisphere seasons)

Here in Sydney I grow it alongside all other cooler growing Paphs and other orchids, in a polycarbonate roofed shade house. All orchids in this growing house get watered all year round but, as you would expect, I water much less in winter. I try to follow the principle of only watering when the orchid has begun to genuinely dry from its previous watering but no one ever quite gets this exactly right. Sometimes you water too soon, sometimes too late, but at least you pursue an objective.

Parishii is a big orchid for a Paph. It has thick succulent leaves up to 45cm long and each leaf lasts quite a few years on the plant. The flower spike is about 50-60cm and arches upward and out but I like to stake them more upright to display the flowers to advantage and help with transport. It can have up to 8 flowers on the spike but 5 or 6 is more common. Flowers are about 16cm from top to bottom and the delicious twisty handlebar moustache petals are 10cm long. Flowers open successively from the bottom up over a week or so, until all are open at the same time. They then last for over a month before the oldest begin to fade out.

This is one of the few of the multi-flowered Paphs that seems quite temperature tolerant. In my growing house it would regularly be subjected to just a few degrees C and in summer it can get the opposite extremes up to 40°C. It is obviously a rather tough orchid. I grow it in an 8 inch terracotta pot in a mix of various pine bark sizes, favouring large-medium, plus a goodly adding of crumbled styrene foam. But despite all that, I don't think it is all that fussy.

Divisions are very hard to come by and very expensive but on the other hand, seedlings are v-e-r-y slow.

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Society News (if anyone has a news item, please phone Jim on 9476 3383, or email at jimbydie@bigpond.com)
President Dennys' Desk – **Reminder for Member's Social Event:** At noon until 3.00 pm on Saturday the 28th March, a sausage-sizzle-BBQ and tea fest will be held at Janine's and Dennys' home in Hornsby Heights. The fare will be very simple and, the society will be paying for your bread roll, sausages, onions and some salad. Complimentary coffee and tea and tea and tea and more tea will also be provided. You are most welcome to bring other drinks as you need and/or a sweet if you like. This should be a good time to really get to know new folk and think about ideas and suggestions to benefit members for the forthcoming year. **Please RSVP** by 17th March via the KOS email address or ring/SMS Dennys directly on 04388 77689. Address details will be given on receipt of your RSVP.

Novice Benching – The first benching of a novice can be a very enjoyable event. Some plants generally grown by novices are starting to flower so, if in doubt, bring your plants along to the next meeting and get some advice. If you are unsure about filling out the benching card ask a committee member or any member and you will receive help.

Charity Donation – In accordance with our constitution and after discussion of the options made available to the committee, the committee has resolved that a donation of \$500 to the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Women's Shelter will be recommended to the members of the society for approval (by majority) at the March General Meeting.

Disposable cups - Many orchid societies are moving to reduce the number of non-degradable cups that are used for supper. KOS still has disposable cups in stock which can be run down over the next few months. So, as a suggestion, if you can bring your own cup for the night it would be good practice until we finalise a mutually acceptable policy.

1. New Members – Deborah Webb joined us as a new member last month. Welcome aboard Deborah, I hope you enjoy your new membership. Sometimes it takes a little while to find your way around and work out what is going on. Be patient with us and we will try to help you acclimatize. Would old hands please help Deb feel welcome.

2. New Growing Competition – Roll up, Roll up, Roll up. This month we are starting a new growing competition with some great orchids we have purchased from Barrita orchids. To join the competition you purchase a plant at this coming meeting and bring it along every few months when we tell you to. It is a competition to see who grows it best, but the real objective is to share knowledge in a practical sense and for us all to see what succeeds and to learn how to do it better. The orchid will cost you \$8 and is one of Barrita's crosses of deep red x deep red. Details below.



The cross is *Sarcochilus Kulnura Dazzel* 'Multi purple' x *Kulnura Dazzel* 'Deep Velvet'

The Growing Competition rules are :

- There will be two separate classes OPEN AND NOVICE.
- The plants are to be presented for judging every THREE months,
- A separate area will be provided for judging, a normal benching ticket must be filled out for each plant
- Points will be awarded at each judging based on growth and health of the plant. The judges will allocate 6 points for first, 4 for second, 2 for third, and 1 point for every other plant benched.

The competition will run for 24 months and a prize will be given to the person who has the highest tally in open and to the highest in novice. A plant that flowers during the comp. does not affect the scores or end the competition.

3. Fees – **The deadline for paying your membership fees is 31 March.** (\$15 single, \$18 family).

You can pay by direct deposit to **BSB No 032 188, account name Ku-Ring-Gai Orchid Society Inc., and account number 103568.** If you use this method, we now ask that you use **Your Full Name** as the payment description.

You can of course also pay in person to Jessie Koh at the next meeting, or mail in a cheque. But, if you do pay in person or by cheque, please include a completed '**annual membership renewal form**' with the payment (as attached). Copies of the form will be available at the meeting but will also be sent with the email send out.

4. Library Report – The January- March edition of the Orchid Digest is new to the library. It features an image of *Masdevallia caudata* on the front cover. Articles include "new" orchid species; slipper orchid hybrids; orchids that grow in coffee plantations and how aspects of cultivation especially the level of natural shading affect the orchids that grow on the remnant trees and coffee bushes; European terrestrial orchids - the first article outlines the amount of variation within species, the second article describes wild flowers of the Italian Dolomites and the orchids that live there; a Californian growers experience with making a large greenhouse.

Coming Event Dates

- Note - Sapphire Coast Orchid Society Workshop changed (was Merimbula) now Moruya CWA and only Sat 21/3
- 28 March – (Saturday noon – 3pm) Members home visit at the Angove's. See detail above.
- 28-29 March – Collectors Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon Rd, Clarendon
- 24-26th April – Open weekend at Royale Orchids, 70 Brieses Rd, Peats Ridge. Many extra guest vendors.
- 15-17 May – (Fri, Sat, Sun) – Multi society show and vendors fair, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon

Tampering - I just relabeled all the jars in my wife's spice rack. I am not in trouble yet. But the thyme is cumin.

Best of the Evening – Hybrid – Catasetum Penang ‘Wirra Willa’ FCC AOC – grown by G & J Fulcher

Now this was something special. It is a bit tricky to present a Catasetum in prime condition at a monthly meeting given that most Catasetum flowers only last 8 to 10 days, but this one was perfect. It was not only judged Best of the Evening, the judges took it out the back room and judged it for an award where it was given an FCC.

Catasetum Penang is a hybrid registered in 1989 by the Ooi Leng Sun nursery in Malaysia. The parents are Susan Fuchs and the species *Catasetum pileatum* but although this makes it a 4th generation hybrid, there are only two species in its makeup – *Catasetum expansum* (37.5%) and *Ctsm pileatum* (62.5%). The two species are closely related, similar in shape, and have the biggest lip and roundest form of all Catasetums.

Unfortunately for most of us, both species come from warm area of the Amazon Basin closer to the foothills of the western side of the Andes. They don't occur in the same areas but rather similar areas. In Orchidwiz, the Baker's habitat information says:

C. expansum – “Ecuador. This orchid grows in the western provinces of Manabi, Esmeraldas, Guayas, and Carchi. Plants grow on trees in dry forests west of the Cerros de Colonche and in the Rio Mira Valley. Plants usually grow somewhat inland below 2150 ft. (650 m).” They go on to tell us that habitat temperature hardly varies from month to month throughout the whole year, rarely exceeding 30°C or going below 18°C. The day to night variation is about 5°C all year round. Rainfall is very low all year round but a bit more substantial in July through Oct., although moisture is available from dew and mist even in the dry months, and humidity is 70-80% all year round.

C. pileatum – “Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. In Venezuela, plants have been found at 400-500 ft. (120-150 m) at several locations on the upper Río Orinoco in Amazonas Territory and on the Río Capanaparo in the state of Apure. In Brazil, plants are found in hot, moist lowlands in the states of Pará and Amazonas. Although this orchid is reportedly found in Colombia and Ecuador, we have found no habitat information for those regions.” Like *excavatum*, habitat temperature hardly varies from month to month although perhaps a couple of degrees C lower than *excavatum*. Day to night variation is again only 5°C all year round and humidity is again 70-80% all year round. *Pileatum* experiences much more rain than *excavatum*. It gets some rain all year round and much heavier July through Oct.

These orchids are WARM growers. Some Catasetums can be grown as having a deciduous dormant period in Winter and therefore not particularly worried by a colder winter temperatures, provided you keep them dry, but this can't be applied to *pileatum* or *excavatum* or their hybrids. If you admire Penang or its parents and have a mind to try them, I suggest you try a few of the more cold tolerant types and master their culture first.

Footnote : The cultivar name Wirra Willa brings a note of nostalgia to many Sydney growers. It was the nursery name of a business run by one of our long term Ku-Ring-Gai members (and best growers) ‘Gowan Stewart’, and her partner Grant Young. Grant tragically passed away unexpectedly at an early age some years back. Geoff and Jean were close friends of Grant and Gowan and have maintained their friendship with Gowan.

Other Catasetinae

There was also another lovely Catasetum family orchid benched at our February meeting, right alongside the Fulcher's BOE. Any other month it would probably have been Best of the Evening itself. It was *Clowesetum Jumbo Apollo* and it was also outstanding. The two together had clusters of viewers about them all night.

Jumbo Apollo was BOE at Kuringai in 2018 and there was a full write up in the Feb 2018 bulletin which can no doubt still be found on the internet if you are interested.

I won't repeat that info but what I thought might be more useful is to offer some pointers for information on growing Catasetum alliance orchids if you have mind to give them a go. For example, a few years back our bulletin reproduced a very insightful article by Sue Bottom from the St Augustine Orchid Society in Florida about various Catasetinae. And of course Fred Clarke of Sunset Valley Orchids in California is famous for breeding and developing some amazing new types and has been a guest speaker at our meetings.

I am sure you could find more but here are few good links for a start:

[Catasetums and Their Kin - St. Augustine Orchid Society](#) (Sue Bottom's article)

<http://www.aos.org/AOS/media/Content-Images/PDFs/catasetums.pdf> (Fred Clarke)

<http://herebutnot.com/care-growing-catasetinae-dry-climates/> (an interesting variation for culture in a dry climate)

Did you Know ? - A recent study found that the average Australian walks 900 miles a year? Another study found the average Australian consumes 22 gallons of alcohol a year. That means on average, AUSSIES get 41 miles to the gallon. Not bad for old technology.



Watering and Potting Mixes to Suit What you are Growing - Peter D'Olier

Since the middle of last year, I have had a lot more time to look after the orchid collection which Jane and I have grown to about 1200 plants. After considering all that we had learned from a variety of sources, including the orchid collection at the Botanic Gardens, we decided to update our practices and our culture.

Prior to this summer we had been watering 2-3 times a week during summer and about once a week during winter, and fertilising once each week with a very weak concentration. Most of our plants were grown in peat and perlite, with some, like the Pleurothallis, in sphagnum moss. We had only very few mounted orchids as our growing conditions were too dry for them.

Overall, I think our conditions were too dry and this showed in the desiccated condition of quite a few of our plants and the losses we had. So, our first fundamental decision was to significantly increase our watering. But, as doing this would upset the effect of the various mediums we had used in the past, we needed to reconsider the mediums we would use to suit the changed watering regime. Once these decisions had been made, almost our whole orchid collection needed to be repotted into whatever new medium would best help each orchid grow and prosper under the revised watering.

However, common sense tells you that watering and media are not the whole story so perhaps next I should tell you all about our growing conditions and the new culture practices.

Our Growing Conditions - Almost all of our orchids are kept under polycarbonate roofing all year. There is a separate fogging system installed to increase humidity levels, and about a 1/3rd of the area can be heated during winter. Our growing areas have 3 horizontal levels. Higher light plants such as Vandaceous and Dendrobiums are hung from the roof; Laeliinae and other brighter light genera are at bench level, and lower light plants such as Pleurothallis, Restrepia and Masdevallias are on lower levels below the main benches, where it is a bit darker.

About 3/4 of our collection are species and the rest hybrids. We don't concentrate on just a few genera but try to grow as many genera as we can buy. We find it more interesting, but it may not be the best approach if you want a simple life. Having such a wide range of types of orchids also means we have to investigate and understand how each species grows in its natural habitat so that we can best fit its culture into our growing conditions and in particular, by the selection of the growing media and growing location.

The New Watering, Fertilising, and Culture Regime - A few orchids are going to require specially tailored watering but for most our aim is to now water approximately every second day for most of the year except winter. On hot days this will be increased to daily, or decreased if the weather is too cool or wet.

In winter, watering for the majority will be once or twice a week.

We ***hand water*** using a trigger operated water wand to ensure even watering, and that every plant is watered.

Fertiliser - One advantage of more frequent watering is that we can safely increase the amount of fertilizing, which should be good. We still fertilise with Peters Excel once a week but have increased the concentration from 1/4 strength to the lower end of the range recommended by the manufacturer. This is about 2 to 4 times the strength we were previously using. Currently the fertiliser concentration we are using is 90 parts per million of Nitrogen. It may be possible to increase this to 100 ppm, but we will see.

We also periodically spray the foliage with a seaweed based fertiliser with neem oil or eco oil added. The seaweed acts as a tonic and root promoter, and the neem and eco oils are wetting agents to help the seaweed fertiliser stick to the leaves and these are also our main pest control. It is best to apply this at a cooler part of the day, so the spray lasts on the foliage longer and the leaves do not burn due to the oils being in the sun.

The seaweed product we use is a mix of Arcadian and Aminogro.

Air circulation - With more watering we had to have more ventilation to avoid rotting the new growths (due to water in the crowns), and to encourage drying out. Extra ventilation also helps the orchids, so we had to install more fans which run 24 hours a day.

Unsuitable old mixes - We knew that the decision to water a lot more would mean that (in particular) the peat and perlite mix we were using would be too wet, and roots would quickly rot. We also wanted to continue watering almost everything at the same time, so this meant we were going to need a range of mixes to suit different genera and different pot sizes, so that (hopefully) they would dry out at about the same rate.

Selecting New Mediums - In selecting mediums for a frequent watering regime, they needed to be :

- very open and free draining.
- the components used had to be the ***best quality*** so that they don't break down too quickly.

We use Orchinata Bark from New Zealand (but there are others just as good), and Besgro Sphagnum Moss also from New Zealand. Even with the best quality media, we may need to repot more often than previously to avoid mixes breaking down and becoming too wet. We will also be aiming to make sure all of the collection is reasonably uniform in the age of the mix so you do not get differential drying between old and new mixes.

Pots also needed to be as free draining as possible.

Light Levels? - We haven't done it this season but we believe we should also be able to increase the light levels next year. We will use a thinner shade cloth during summer and will remove 1 layer of shade cloth during winter.

Micro climates - There are always different micro climates within any growing area, with some areas wetter or darker. These affects your choices of which orchids are in these areas and also growing media to use.

So now I want to talk about the various **media** we use for the various types of plants and growing areas:

Choice of mixes

1. Basic Mix

This is the mix we try to use as much as possible. It is a very open and the water just flows through. It is made up of:

- 3 Parts 9-12 grade bark
- 3 Parts 12-18 grade bark
- 4 Parts pumice 7- 20 grade (washed to remove fines)
- 2 Parts charcoal (washed to remove dust) (this is sometimes omitted if run out)
- * The bark is organic and retains the moisture but breaks down over time.
- * The pumice doesn't break down like the bark and helps keep the mix open as the bark breaks down. It also absorbs some water to help keep the mix moist.
- * The charcoal is also inert to help keep the mix open and it also absorbs excess salts from the fertilizing.

We vary the Basic Mix slightly depending on the pot size. For example, we add :

- For Large Pots – add more 12-18 grade bark so that the mix doesn't stay too wet
- For the smaller pots – add more 9-12 grade bark so that they don't dry out too quickly.

Although it would be great to use the Basic Mix throughout the collection, it doesn't appear to suit all plants and micro climates. So, we have some other mixes and media for different combinations.

2. Seedlings and some particular plants in small 60mm pots.

This requires a smaller sized media, so it doesn't dry out too quickly. For this we use

- 3 Parts 6-9 grade bark
- 3 Parts 9-12 grade bark
- 2 Parts small pumice (Washed)
- 2 Parts super coarse/Jumbo perlite (wash to remove dust & wear dust mask when measuring/washing)
- 1 Part small charcoal (washed)

(This mix is a bit of a trial and we will see how it goes.)

3. Large Vanda Mix

This year we are trialing the larger vandaceous plants in slotted/mesh pots and because of the size of the holes in the pots, the Basic Mix doesn't stay in the pot so we are using the largest bark we have (12-18 grade but 18-25 may be better). We will see how this goes. It does dry out very quickly and may not be damp enough. It may be changed.

4. Pleurothallis, Restrepias and similar plants and others such as such Phalaenopsis

These are typically smaller plants that often grow as epiphytes in shadier, wet and humid conditions often with mosses around the roots. We think these types of orchids are better grown in sphagnum moss. This is a mix of moistened sphagnum moss and grated styrene to help keep the mix open. The downside of using Sphagnum Moss is that it should be replaced every year, or it goes stale and the plants go backwards.

In addition to these mixes, there are other specialist mix requirements for orchids such as terrestrials, Pterostylis and other Australian natives, different mixes for specialist pots such as waterwell pots and for different methods such as mounting plants.

Summary – there are of course variations for other specific orchid groups and circumstances but I am sure you all see the principles being applied. What we can tell you from our experience with these practices so far is that increased watering brings with it some upsides and some downsides.

On the positive side, plants seem to be growing better and healthier and we are now hoping for better flowering. We have noticed there are often more new leads initiated. Instead of 1 new lead we often now get 2. Because more time is taken with watering, we are better observing the plants and the changes occurring and what is needed. There are less pests due to the better condition of the plants. Investigating and observing orchid requirements makes orchid growing more interesting.

On the negative side, we have to be more mindful of the pots and mixes we use so that watering can remain simultaneous for most of the collection. We now have a lot more types of mixes which makes things more complicated. We have had to increase air movement and watch for new growths being too wet and rotting. Watering takes longer as plants as watered more individually, and there is a fine balance to avoid overwatering.

Best of the Evening Novice – Oncidium Kaiulani – grown by Yvonne Szeto-Low

Very nicely grow Yvonne. Look at those lush leaves and bulbs just busting to get bigger and to grow in all directions. And what a curious little hybrid this one is. It is a primary hybrid that was registered in 1940 by F Atherton in Hawaii, and from its two species parents you would have expected it to be a raging success.

Parent one is Onc. Ornithorhynchum, or at least that is what it was called when this hybrid was registered. It was later realized that the same species name had already been published for a different, yellow flowered orchid from the Andes that has also become commonly known as Onc pyramidale. What a pity. Still, rules are rules, and the oldest name stands. So now, the pink flowered parent all of us knew as O. ornithorhynchum, now has to be known as Onc. sotoanum.



Onc. sotoanum is a very attractive orchid. It comes from northern Central America, and grows as an epiphyte in humid forests at altitudes up to 1500 meters. It is only a medium sized plant with sort of flat 5-6cm pseudobulbs with thin, flexible, greyish green 20cm leaves. The wiry flower spikes come from the base of the bulb and arch up and out before becoming a little pendulous. Each spike has many side branches and lots and lots of small (2cm), fragrant, long lasting pink flowers. The species likes a semi-winter rest. Perhaps sotoanum's most significant drawback is that the flowers on its wiry inflorescences and branches frequently become tangled together and look a touch untidy. Which brings us to parent number two – Oncidium flexuosum.

Flexuosum is one tough little dude from Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. It also has small flowers, and lots of them, but they are yellow and brown and carried on tall upright spikes that are typically 120cm tall, and can be taller. On the positive side, it has more flowers than sotoanum, they are slightly larger at 3cm, the spikes are straight up and have branches and sub branches. Although it's natural habitats are only given as up to 1200m elevation, its distribution range goes down to nearly Argentina on Brazil's east coast, and as this might suggest, it grows coastal cold very happily in Sydney's climate.

One might have expected that Kaiulani would get the best of both parents. More upright spikes but not as tall as flexuosum, less tangled flower displays, and a bit tougher growth characteristics. But, as sometimes happens, it didn't happen. Kaiulani is still pink like sotoanum (or at least all those I have seen are), and it is a good grower, but the spikes are shorter, have less flowers and more sparsely spaced than sotoanum. The flowers that do occur are just about as tangled as sotoanum as well. Not a bad orchid and quite pretty, but if I was to rate it as a hybrid success or not, I would have to say 'not'.

Below are pictures of an O. sotoanum and flexuosum that achieved culture awards. And the very best picture of a flowering O. Kaiulani that I could find. The comparison may be a touch unfair to Kaiulani but you get the point.



O. flexuosum 'Alexandra' and O. sotoanum 'Bruce' (both CC/OSCOV)

O. Kaiulani (Fivedock OS show 2007)

Close Friends - Mick and Paddy were on one of those open cockpit seaside aeroplane joyrides when Mick asks :
“Paddy, if this plane were to turn upside down right now, do you think we would fall out?”
“Not a chance”, replied Paddy, “we’d still be mates.”