

SHEFFIELD & DISTRICT ORCHID SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2010



Prostecchia vitellina
March Plant of the Month

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EDITORIAL

The day before mothering Sunday I was doing another orchid doctor session at my local garden centre. A mix up with the advertising made it a fairly quiet day, with most people looking for me on the Sunday (which was of course the day of the SDOS meeting), so I had a few to phone back. They sold 31 orchids on the day so were quite happy. As usual, there is a memorable comment/overheard moment, and this one was from a small toddler who said simply 'Mummy, I want to meet Santa'. Her mother, unimpressed, dragged her away to the tills.

Whilst there, I tend to walk around a bit to avoid looking like a member of the staff ('excuse me, are these seeds organic?' etc.), and found several different bags of mycorrhizal fungus from Rootgrow - www.rootgrow.co.uk/rootgrow_information.php They are targeting roses and trees, but it makes me wonder if they would be useful for orchids, particularly the hardy ones, or for establishing de-flasked seedlings. Have any of you tried it, or know whether it should be best avoided? If not, then I might write to the Orchid Review to give a definitive answer – I think the amateur grower needs to know!

BUSINESS

John chaired the meeting in Richard's absence (at BOC).

Our annual show at Bakewell is now ever looming, and arrangements are becoming more finalised with each passing day. Flyers are now available, and members were encouraged to distribute these in local garden centres/florists etc. Final details will be confirmed at next month's meeting.

The society did well at the recent Harrogate show, with Ted winning best species in show with *Lycaste campbellii*, and other awards went to Ian Dorman and Charles Ford. Thanks to all who supplied plants and attended the event. The next show is at Bowburn on April 11th, which clashes with our own meeting at Ranmoor. The display will be mounted by John Garner, Charles & JJ Ford. Please can you let either Charles Ford or Julie have any plants for the display by Friday 9th April (please phone first).

Members were informed that there will be a fragrance class at Peterborough this year – with some significant prizes for the winners (I'll have to dig out some old Brut – Ed).

THE TABLE SHOW

This month's commentary was given by Silvia, who started with Phal First Delight with 2 spikes of pink veined flowers with a nice red lip. Phal. Zuma Camreal x *aphrodite* was a nice white with medium sized flowers. Next were 2 pots full of the delightful Australian species *Pterostylis curta*.

In the Cattleyas, Ctt. Gold Digger 'Fuchs Mandarin' was a small orange flowered plant. Ctt. Madge Fordyce 'Red Orb' was a small solid red, and Ctt. Trick or Treat was a tall, small flowered orange type. C. *intermedia* f. *aquilia* was mainly white, but with purple tips to the petals, which is a peloric form. Lc. Santa Barbara Sunset was very tall with an arching spike of a single flower. The hybrid is 75% *anceps* which explains the habit.

Cymbidiums are becoming rarely seen, so it was good to see one here, which was the pale green & white Sleeping King x Esmeralda. Pths. *schweinfurthii* was a large potful of many spikes of several deep red

flowers. It likes cool damp conditions. *Prostechea vitellina* is a plant whose name has changed frequently over the years (and still appears to be duplicated) had 3 spikes of small flowers. The colour can vary, but this was the 'normal' form, and was adjudged to be the plant of the month (see front cover).

Den. *aphyllum* had a couple of lengthy pendant canes holding many delicate pale pink blooms. Den. Stardust 'Chiomi' was a small plant with several pale yellow flowers. This yellow form (from *unicum*) was first seen at the Glasgow WOC as huge plants, and it was a sensation! Den. *bigibbum* is a phalaenopsis type with 2 spikes of smallish purple flowers. Den. *nobile* 'Gatton Monarch' is a well known cultivar of good size, shape and colour (pale pink & white). Several pots of shorter plants were possibly either *kingianum* or *delicatum*, or a hybrid between the 2 (Den. Gillian Leaney)

Wils. Intermezzo had a couple of arching spikes of small purple flowers, as would be expected from being 50% *Onc. ornithorhynchum*. Coel. *cristata* demonstrated just how unruly it can be by having 2 creeping rhizomes heading in opposite directions. It has nice white flowers.

Phrag. Don Wimber was a fine upstanding plant with a tall spike and a flower of good substance. Don was noted for his work on polyploidy and producing 'better' hybrids, especially with the EYOF. This orange flowered plant is grown in rockwool, and is best kept moist. Paph. *callosum* is a nice species of variable colour, and this was the coloratum form. Paph. *boxallii* is considered a variety of *villosum*. This is rarely seen, but is a very nice flower. Paph. *delenatii* was a good clone with a nice scent. This plant was one of the rediscovered clones with a pale colour and a darker pouch. Several of the complex types completed the display. Thank you Silvia. JG

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Encyclia Vitellina?

Er, no

Epidendrum Vitellinum?

.....no????

PROSTHECHEA VITELLINA!!

Whatever.....

I bought this from Orchideen Kopf three years ago and it's been called all of the above in that time. God knows what it will be in another three years.

However, it grows alongside all the others in my mostly intermediate conservatory and does very well with the Phals but with more light. Feeding and watering are as always, more when growing, less when not, but that said if this plant is not in flower it's putting on new growth and most of the time doing both so there is no real rest period. I have dropped it on once in three years and it's due to get a bigger pot as soon as the root development is well underway. I will move it even if it is in flower as I did before with no ill effects. **Charles Ford**

PLEIONES, SUSTAINABLE GROWING, BY JOHN CRAVEN

John is a long standing member at Sheffield, and has been growing these little gems for almost 40 years. He first saw Pleiones in 62/63 when working as a young gardener in Bolton. These were *formosana*, and were very attractive as well as unusual. One of their major appeals was that they didn't need heat unlike most orchids. After seeing how easily they grew and multiplied, John took the plunge and bought some *formosana* 'Snow White'. These were quite expensive at the time, but have repaid the cost many times over as he still has the stock some 40 years later, and of course they flower every year. They really are plants for sustainable growing.

Pleiones were first discovered by Don in 1825, and they were initially classed as Coelogynes, and still remain in that tribe. Generally they are from the high altitude areas east of the Himalayas, across Asia to Taiwan, and grow in dappled wooded areas. They are deciduous, and often suffer freezing temperatures. Plants grow from an annual pseudobulb which then dies to be replaced by a new one. The flowers are produced first and the leaves later. The bulbs have sufficient energy to produce the flowers without watering as they don't produce roots until the leaves start growing, but dampness is useful to prevent dessication or poor flowers.

Ownership of the genus has varied over the years, with neither the RHS or the Alpine Garden Society wanting anything to do with them for many years. They are now RHS, and included within the Sanders hybrid lists.

The end of the year is critical in the cycle for commercial growing. The bulbs and bulbils should be collected, cleaned and sorted into size. The biggest retained for exhibitions are repotted about 2" apart. Clay pots are best for this as they help in cooling. These plants should be kept cold and only warmed up a few weeks prior to a show. Most will be 4-5 weeks, but some will be 6-7 weeks from flowering. A large shop style drink chiller is used to keep plants for this purpose. Shading early in the greenhouse will help to keep them cool and prolong the length of the flowers. The larger non-exhibition bulbs are potted individually for sale, and the smaller ones and bulbils go into trays to grow onto flowering size.

Compost is important, with some variation. The species prefer moss, with some being wood moss, and others sphagnum moss. The hybrids tend to go into a mix of nugget bark with varying amounts of perlite and osmunda.

As the flowers die, the roots and leaves start to grow, and watering/feeding can begin in earnest. Don't over feed however as this causes leaf tip dieback. John uses Maxicrop (seaweed extract) at a rate of 3 teaspoons per gallon every few weeks. Pure water is used at other times. During the summer, plants will grow outside, often in full sun. Their delicate leaves will attract a few bugs – false spider mites are an issue, and are treated with neem oil, whilst aphids receive a dose of Bug Free. The leaves die back in Autumn, and the cycle begins again.

Hybridisation has greatly enhanced the range of Pleiones, although it wasn't until the 70's that it began. John has made several, although only 1 is registered (Ruby Wedding). Shantung registered in 1977 (by Dr Harberd in Leeds) was probably the major breakthrough as it was the first to incorporate the yellow forrestii. Mixing yellows with pinks can give rise to various shades in between such as peach etc. Some 5000 seedlings were raised of the cross, with just 16 being retained as named clones. Some of these (Ridgeway/Ducat) attracted prices of £200 per bulb at the time! This hybrid has been used many times with

other species and selected hybrids to produce some fine progeny. Using *forrestii* has also created some very good primary hybrids.

John then went through some of the very best hybrid clones explaining the best features of each such as Stephanie Rose, El Pico 'Kestrel' is tall, Vesuvius 'Phoenix' is vibrant, Krakatoa has good peach colours, Stromboli 'Fireball' lasts 5 weeks, San Salvador produces a good yellow line.

In the species, *formosana* album 'Claire' is white with a pale yellow throat, *limprichtii* is very hardy and will grow outdoors, *taliensis* is tall. *forrestii* has a good tale to tell, with only 1 bulb remaining in the UK during WW2. This was in fact a natural hybrid called x *confusa* (which became a parent of Shantung). Being a hybrid is possibly why it survived... This only became apparent when Roy Lancaster fetched some true *forrestii* back with him from China.

After a few questions, a hearty round of applause was given. Thank you, John. NB. Further info on the species can be found in the May 2008 newsletter. JG

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

MONTHLY MEETINGS AT RANMOOR – 2PM

- Apr 11th** **Arthur Deakin**, 30 years an orchid grower – what have I learnt?
- May** No meeting due to the show at Bakewell.
- June 13th** Road trip to visit John Garner's greenhouse (and contents).
(NB. Not at Ranmoor)

OTHER SHOWS

- Apr 11th** North East of England Annual Show
Bowburn Village Hall . SDOS exhibiting.
- May 1st – 3rd** Raby Castle orchid show, Staindrop.
- May 9th** SDOS annual show at Bakewell

THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE ORCHID?



APOC 10 (Asia-Pacific Orchid Congress) was held in Beijing this month. Exhibited there was an orchid reputed to be worth 15,000,000 RMB (£1,500,000). It certainly had the security to go with that sort of price tag. I'll have three, what about you?
Charles Ford

