

**Sheffield & District
Orchid Society
Newsletter
March 2015**



**March Plant of the Month
Dendrobium New Star**

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Business

We exhibited at the recent Harrogate OS show at Bramhope, and won 2 Highly commended cards for V. Bangsai Queen (Brian Woodward) and Onc. Stirling Tiger (Peter Battle), and congratulations to them. Sadly there were no class winners, despite it being a reasonable display. Thanks are due to Ted, Annette, Don & Margaret for their management of the exhibit as well as those members who supplied plants. Our next exhibit is at the NEEOS show at Bowburn on Sunday 29th March for which plants are required. Carolyn is still taking orders for advance tickets for the 3 Counties show at Malvern in June. These are £6 for a day ticket – a considerable discount to the official entrance ticket price. Orders can be taken up to and including the Chatsworth weekend, and an SAE should be included as there is no SDOS meeting between then and the show itself.

Following the EOC in London in April one of the international lecturers will be speaking at the Lincoln meeting on Monday 14th April. Andrea Nielson is from Columbia and will speak on Pleurothallids. Entrance is free. Another free lecture involves Ian Chalmers who is talking to EMOS on Sunday 19 April at 2.30 in Bottesford village hall, NG13 0BG, and is entitled "Australian Orchid Species and where they grow".

Details for our annual show at Chatsworth will be covered at next month's meeting.

The Table Show

Silvia gave this month's table show commentary, and said it was quite a pretty display. The first plant was the specimen Den. New Star covered all around in attractive pink flowers. The plant totally filled the pot, and is ready to be repotted/divided. It was judged to be the plant of the month getting 25 points. A couple of Den. *phalaenopsis* hybrids were next being compact and well flowered with white based purple striped flowers. Den. *kingianum* was 1 of the smaller forms with a covering of good pink flowers. It is quite a variable species, and this is towards the smaller end and doesn't take up too much room.

Prostechea *cochleata* was a tall plant that had developed a huge bulb supporting a strong spike of the 'octopus' flowers. It will continue to flower for a while, and is kept moderately moist. Pros. *vitellina* is quite different with small bright orange flowers on 2 strong spikes. The leaves on this species are easily marked as they have a silvery sheen to them that are damaged by a simple touch. It is still well worth growing for the colour of the flowers. Ctt. Chit Chat had a long flower spike with 5 open orange flowers and 3 buds still to come. Poor staking of the spike had resulted in some of the flowers being on their side which spoils the effect. This had come about as the owner hadn't expected such a long spike, and emphasises the need to support the spike as early as practical (especially important with Chatsworth coming up). Ctt. Little Hazel is a very compact plant with a lot of growth. It was a shame that it had just a single spike of small deep red flowers, but as it gets bigger then this should happen naturally. Rth. Haw Yuan Gold Yung Kang #2' FCC/RHS had a couple of very large yellow flowers, which (unusually for flowers of this size) was slightly fragrant. It is due for repotting shortly.

Phal. Spider Beauty had an arching spike with 5 good sized flowers evenly spaced. These were an attractive veined pink colour. Pterostylis *curta* is now at the end of its flowering season, and this was indeed the last of 9 pots from the production line. It is grown in a cold greenhouse, and is rested during the summer.

In the slippers, Paph. Lathamianum is an old primary hybrid (1888, *spicerianum* x *villosum*) that is still quite decent and a reliable flowerer - although more recent hybrids have moved on considerably from this simplicity. Paph. Flame of Sunset 'Chilton' comfortably demonstrates the increase in size and selection of flower shape and colour, and this is a reddish flower with fine spotting. Paph. Bob Cat 'Cooksbridge' AM/RHS was a nice shaped large yellow. It isn't quite at its best due to the current growing environment, and should improve in the future. Phrag.

Hanne Popow had a tall flower spike with a single small pinkish flower at the top that looks a little out of place on a largish size plant. The plant is growing well, and should do much better as a specimen in a couple of years.

An unnamed *Oncidium* was in excellent health with over half a dozen even spikes of mottled purple flowers. It is not too dissimilar to *Violetta von Holm*, but is definitely a hybrid of *Rst. bictoniense*. *Aliceara Eurostar* is a frequent visitor to the show table, and is widely available through mericlone. It is a good do'er and produced starry red flowers with white tips. One of the parents of *Eurostar* is *Tahoma Glacier* which was next. This has roundish flowers of white with a central reddish mask. This is also readily available (often unlabelled in DIY stores) and a good grower. *Onc. Stirling Tiger* is a large yellow *Odont* with some small spotting. This had a tall spike with a good flower count, and improving year on year. *Ros. ampliatum* had 3 spikes of small yellow flowers with brown edges. It is grown in intermediate conditions. It is kept fairly dry.

The final plant was the specimen *Masd. picea* with short tubular triangular flowers all around the edges. These are brownish in colour, and the plant is grown cool. Many thanks, Silvia.

March Plant of the Month

Dendrobium New Star

Is a complex hybrid, based on *D. nobile* and first registered in 1988.

This one is a plant that I have been growing on now for 10 years, dropping on as each pot has become full. I keep it in reasonably good light all year, with moderate shading in the summer, and with a little during the winter.

Temperatures in that part of my Conservatory regularly reach 28-30C and go down to 12C on winter nights. This seems to be a temperature tolerant hybrid, based to a large extent on *D. nobile* but containing contributions from six other species (notably *D. regium*) via some complex breeding. It does not take well to high light, preferring some shade. During growth, which will begin during flowering, feed and water it copiously, but when terminal leaves are spotted on the canes, allow drying off until you can see that the new buds forming along the pseudobulbs are really flowers or all you will get are kiekis!

The growing medium is a mix of medium bark and coco husk with a little charcoal thrown in for seasoning. The centre of the plant has been in the same growing medium now for 10 years but the bark seems to stand up well with little sign of deterioration and the plant does not seem to mind, however the plant is now showing signs of "old age" and is, in effect, five or six separate plants now so it is time for division and a new start. **Charles Ford**

My First Greenhouse

(A Challenge in Retirement) David Menzies

David has been to talk at Sheffield on many occasions and needs little or no introduction. He retired from his duties at the Glasgow RBG in 2010, and prior to that he had plans for his retirement... The original thought has been to return to New Zealand and retire in a slightly warmer climate than the one he is used to in Scotland. The main problem was that he lives in a very large house that has become almost too full of his sons' possessions whilst they are in smaller accommodation elsewhere – this tends to include cars for restoration etc. The lure of home (NZ) has to be balanced with not being too far away from the youngsters. It quickly became evident that David and his wife would be staying put in Scotland. With that in mind other plans were brought to bear.

Helensburgh is a classy suburb to the north west of Glasgow that supports local plants/colonies of northern marsh orchids in grass verges. Various hybrids grow well in the garden which overlooks the Firth of Clyde, where trident subs sometimes cruise past. His house is a large Victorian property in gardens of around half an acre, and is mainly surrounded by high walls for privacy. Whilst that helps to keep the sound down from the adjacent kindergarten it involves a good deal of maintenance. Having worked in glasshouses for a long time it is easy to take them for granted, but building one in your own garden is a different matter. The road itself runs E-W, and some consideration was given to having a single sided greenhouse backing onto this, but it wouldn't work well as it may not stand up too well to the 80mph winds that blow every now and then. A solid free standing structure would be better, and this could be positioned in a sheltered section of the grounds. Deciding on the type/style of a greenhouse depends to an extent on what you want to grow in it. Cool growing orchids (minimum of 5C) were the plants of choice, as well as orders from the wife for growing some salad crops for food. A new style of greenhouse was seen at a local agricultural show, and eventually it was selected and purchased.

The Keder greenhouse is a type of polytunnel, but quite different. Old polytunnels are simply hoops rooted in the ground with a large sheet of polythene dragged over the top and weighed down with soil. The polythene sheet doesn't last forever and can get torn easily with sharp debris in the wind, so aren't obviously suitable for orchids where heat is required. This new style is still based loosely on hoops, but of more technology. Keder is a German company, and UK models are fabricated in Evesham, Worcestershire. The concept is fairly simple with using individual reinforced bubble wrap polythene sheets that fit the gap between the hoops by sliding into grooves in the hoops. Technically you can add to the greenhouse at a later date if required (which could be very handy). Once ordered the greenhouse arrived on a single pallet rising to about 6' tall, and would usually require 2 men to assemble and gain the right amount of tension.

Prior to the erection the site needed clearing of part of an old wall as well as some excavation of soil into the gentle slope, and a new shallow retaining wall for the vegetable garden. This took quite a long time to do in small amounts alone just doing a couple of hours a day when the weather allowed. All the spoil was redistributed around the garden and will eventually be cleared with a skip. The site needed to allow for an extra metre or so around the edge to facilitate the erection. With a span of 3M x 8M it was quite an undertaking. Eventually the site was ready and the hoops were fastened to a timber base where subsequently (after tensioning) they were fastened to deep pegs for an anchor. The individual sheets were then slid into place. One of the benefits of a modular design such as this is that ventilation can be built in as required – either facing into the wind or away from it, and several Bayliss automatic vents are fitted. Another is that shading isn't required as the bubbles etc diffuse the light (and there is some shading from adjacent trees). A partition across the middle splits the orchids from the salad crop (grown in raised beds), and each end has a door that allows heat out during hotter days.

Some staging was bought with the tunnel, and used just down 1 side with the intention of having other plants on the floor. The floor was basically soil that turned muddy when wet. Soil also harbours pests such as slugs and these were an early problem. A few bags of small stones were purchased, and David soon discovered they went nowhere, so a wagon load had to be delivered, and soon it was relatively solid underfoot. This also meant that pesticides could be used comfortably (a membrane wasn't an option as this inhibits drainage).

A small collection of Ian Butterfield's Pleiones were the first plants to be introduced to the bench, and this included species (*aurita*, *forrestii* & *grandiflora* were shown) as well as the 'volcanic' hybrids, several of which have NZ names such as Tongariro, Volcanello & Novarupta, as well as other older hybrids. *forrestii* grows best in moss. The collection is currently around 50 varieties, all of which are multiplying at a great rate. A number of Dave Parkinson's Disas are grown on the floor in wet grow trays where the water is changed weekly. These have done very well over the last couple of years and are now ready for repotting. Both species and hybrids are grown and we saw pictures of *uniflora*, *Kewensis*, *Watsonii* and *Unidirosa*. *Vanda falcata* (formerly *Neofinetia*) is another species that is doing very well in a clay pot surrounded by moss. A couple of cool growing *Dendrobiums cucumerinum* and *fleckeri* are doing OK, but Den. Irene Smile (a *nobile* hybrid) died, along with a couple of others.

In the first year there was no proper heating or lighting as there wasn't any power connected. In 2014 David completed a trench from the house to the greenhouse. This needed to be 20" deep for safety, and several tree roots caused some difficulties. It was a labour of love, but there is now electricity to the tunnel, and this runs a 3KW heater as well as providing some light for those long dark winter

days. The heater runs in short bursts to maintain heat, and the associated fan runs constantly to move air around.

Now that the environment is 'complete' a few more plants are being added such as the long admired Cym Sara Jane with pendant spikes of almost pure white flowers. Autumn flowering Pleiones have been added and appear happy. Masd. *prodigiosa* is growing OK, unlike *tovarensis* which instantly shed all of its leaves and died! Pths. *muscosa* and *C. coccinea* (from the high Andes) are also doing well. Other plants will be added as and when...

A few questions were asked, followed by a round of applause. Growing cooler orchids in a relatively cheap modern Polytunnel looks to be a good way forward. Many thanks to David for this very enlightening talk.

Dates for your diary...

Monthly meetings at Ranmoor – 10am

April 12th A practical exercise in table show judging. The plants brought to the table will be looked at more thoroughly and individually considered for their merits.

May No meeting due to the show at Chatsworth.

shows/exhibits/conferences etc

April 9-12th EOC Show & Conference, RHS Halls, London
www.eoclondon2015.org.uk

May 3-4th Raby Castle Orchid Show, Staindrop, Darlington

May 10th SDOS Annual Show, Chatsworth
******PLANTS and support needed ******

Society website - www.sheffieldorchids.org



Above - Cattlianthe Chit Chat

Below - Paph. Falme of Sunset 'Chilton'

