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POLLINIA

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An tEarrach

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Cumann Magairíní na hÉireann



Beannachtaí na Cásca
Happy Easter from the Irish Orchid Society

THE IRISH ORCHID SOCIETY COMMITTEE



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POLLINIA

(pol-LIN-ee-uh)

The compact packets of pollen found in orchid flowers. Plural of *Pollinium*.

Waxy pollen clumps or grains usually found in the anthers of most orchids; often yellow, distinct, and found under the pollen cap of the column.

Pollinia contain the male reproductive cells.

Latin *pollin-*, stem of pollen "fine flour, dust."



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Cumann Magairlí na
hÉireann

A VISIT TO
SICILY

FOR many years I have been reading about the history, culture, and traveller's experiences of Sicily. I had thought about a visit one day, but it wasn't until I received an email advertisement from Ryan Air and noted their flights direct from Dublin to Trapani in Western Sicily -- then on sale at €4.99 each way, plus the usual fees and charges -- that I decided to go. This two-and-a-half hour flight would be cheaper than going to Galway for a weekend. Alitalia's basic airfare from Dublin to Trapani, with stops in London and Rome, a 13-hour journey, listed for €680.

I bought tickets, and went in May 2009; it was a brilliant vacation touring the western parts of the island. In fact, it was so much fun I returned for a longer period in October, and will go again. Say what you will about Ryan Air, but that airline has done more for travel in Europe than any other. Sicily was bursting with tourists from Ireland.

Sicily has many wild orchid species, but I was too early or late in the year. The Botanical Garden in Palermo lists an orchid greenhouse but it was 'closed for repairs' when I was there. My hostess in Palermo, Nicoletta Polo, has promised she will introduce me to local orchid growers on my next visit.

Nonetheless, I hope IOS members will be interested in my description of the Palermo Botanical Gardens. The gardens may make an interesting (and inexpensive) place for Irish tourists to visit, especially when the orchid house reopens, or as part of a tour of wild orchid sites.

There are many other sites and natural preserves where wild orchids may be seen. The Nebrodi Mountains near Mt. Etna are particularly notable. I have published a page on the Pollinia website (www.pollinia.org) with several links to websites about orchids in Italy and Sicily. I anticipate that I will have an article on wild orchids from Sicily in the July issue.

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The Botanical Gardens (Orto Botanico) of Palermo are among the oldest modern centres for botanical studies in the Mediterranean region. The park houses a greenhouse (glasshouse), seed and dried plant repository, catalogue archive, and more than ten hectares of outdoor gardens in the busy centre of what is today Sicily's largest city. The Orto Botanico is home to hundreds of tropical and semi-tropical plants from around the world, many of which

were introduced into Europe by this unique organisation, now administered by the University of Palermo. The medieval kings of Sicily had vast gardens around the palaces known as the Cuba and the Zisa, but in terms of modern botany, the Orto Botanico was founded with eighteenth century biological principles in mind. The Royal Academy of Studies, the university of its day, first established a botanical institute at Palermo in 1779 under the auspices of the government of King Francesco I of the Two Sicilies. Requiring more space, the Botanical Gardens were transferred to their present location, next to the Villa Giulia park, in 1786. The Neo-Classical structures visible today were begun three years later, based on designs by Trombetta, Marabitti and the famous Venanzio Marvuglia. The sculptor Vitale Tuccio created the two sphinxes flanking the steps leading to the main building. These works have been recently restored. One section of the gardens is arranged based on the Engler system, the other on the Linnaean system.

The Orto Botanico has some pleasant surprises. The area was once part of a park owned by the Crown, which used it as a vineyard. Then it was claimed by the Diocese of Palermo, and the ruins of an entrance and wall of the fourteenth century Church of Saint Dennis are still visible in an isolated corner of the Gardens. The Baroque greenhouse seen today was built in cast iron in the late nineteenth century, replacing an older wooden one donated by Queen Maria Carolina of Naples in 1806. The plants themselves include foreign species such as bamboo from Burma, various foreign palms, the coffee plant, sycamore, manioc, papaya and many others. Mandarins and loquats are also present, having been introduced into the agriculture of the Mediterranean countries from the Far East by the Palermo Botanical Gardens between 1812 and 1817 with specimens donated by the British Royal Navy. Here you can also see cotton and sugar cane, once widely cultivated in Sicily. In the Aquarium, a round, multi-tiered pond, there are several species of lotus and water lily, including Oriental varieties. The Orto Botanico also has a large cactus collection.

It's ambience is different from what you might expect in the newer botanical gardens of other nations. Little consideration seems to have been given to the aesthetic element of arboreal areas. In many respects, the Gardens reflect the look they had two centuries ago. Many areas seem haphazardly assembled. Yet, this is precisely what gives the Orto Botanico a slightly wild appearance so welcome in a Sicilian urban park. If you seek symmetry, there's Villa Giulia next door.

One of the more important roles of the Botanical Gardens is cataloging the wild plants found in Sicily, and the University tracks the status and conservation of these species. There's also a special area dedicated specifically to Mediterranean species not present in Sicily. The Orto Botanico belongs to a global network of botanical institutions which exchange seeds, specimens and information.



Entrance of the Giardino d'Inverno

The Botanical Gardens are open to the public most weekdays from 9:00 AM until 1:00 PM, and from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The main entrance is on Via Lincoln. The collections include:

Aquatic plants
Fig Trees
Succulents
Useful Plants
Ferns

Cycads
Carnivorous Plants
Palms
Orchids

Having been developed during the great age of exploration, between the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century the gardens became an important point of reference for the bigger botanical gardens of Northern Europe.

Because of Palermo's favourable climate, they transferred a good number of unknown, poorly classified and exotic tropical species there. In this context, the relationship between the Berlin Botanic Garden, under the stewardship of Adolf Engler, and those of the originating areas of the new world proved to be extremely important.

In the *Settore Sperimentale e delle Piante Utili* (Experimental zone and zone of practical plantings) plants which produce foodstuffs are exhibited, such as sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and (*Sorghum saccharatum*), both used for the production of sugar; avocado (*Persea americana*), various cultivars of banana (*Musa × paradisiaca*, *Musa cavendishi*), pecan nut (*Carya olivaeformis*), not to mention an extensive collection of vegetable plants with over 100 cultivars of great historical interest and hugely important in terms of the conservation of a local gene pool. Lastly we have the medicinal plantings, including *Artemisia absinthium*, *Datura stramonium*, ginseng (*Withania somnifera*), camphour (*Cinnamomum canphora*) and the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*).

For a few years now the gardens have been home to a colony of parrots of the species *Psittacula krameri*, having escaped from the avaries of the nearby Villa Giulia and are perfectly at home in the subtropical habitat of the gardens.

And there are several hundred feral casts living mostly in the trees. You seldom see the cats as they stay fairly hidden. Of course, they keep the garden pest-free.



Washingtonia filefra



The Laghetto of papyrus



As an illustrative example of the role of the Palermo Botanic Garden, consider the introduction into the Mediterranean of the mandarin (*Citrus deliciosa*) and the loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*).

The **Giardino a Succulente** (the garden of succulents) of the bioecological zone is home to numerous species of the genus *Aloe* and various other plants of arid regions, including *Cereus*, *Crassula*, *Euphorbia* and *Opuntia*. Alongside the collection of succulents, there is a huge specimen of *Ficus rubiginosa*, recreating an environment reminiscent of a tropical jungle.

In the area containing Cycadatum there are certain species of cicadi that have a notable history. Of these we have *Cycas revoluta*, donated by Queen Maria Carolina in 1793, was the first such specimen to find a permanent home in Europe. In the following stage of the gardens' development Zamiaceae *Ceratozamia mexicana* and *Dioon edule*, were both introduced from Mexico, as was *Cycas circinalis*, an elegant species from the Indian sub-continent. In 1997 the collection was further improved by the acquisition of a variety of worthy specimens, including *Dioon spinulosum*, *Encephalartos altensteinii*, *Encephalartos longifolius*, *Encephalartos villosus*, *Macrozamia moorei* and *Zamia furfuracea*.

In the area dedicated to palms one can find *Chamaerops humilis*, the only palm native to Sicily, and numerous exotic palms, in which the gardens are particularly blessed. Amongst both potted and fully cultivated specimens, one can count 34 genera and 80 species. The genus *Washingtonia* is represented by *W. filifera*, that flowered in Palermo for the first time ever, and by *W. robusta*. In the genus *Phoenix*, apart from the common date (*Phoenix dactylifera*) there are also *P. rupicola*, *P. reclinata*, *P. canariensis*, *P. roebelinii* and *P. teophrastii*. There are also many other genera: *Chamaedorea*, *Brahea*, *Sabal*, *Erythea*, *Livistona*, *Howea* and *Trachycarpus*.

The **Giardino d'Inverno** (Winter Garden) is home to a number of species native to the warmer climes of Africa, Central America, South America, Asia and Australia. Amongst those that are worth a brief mention, we have the coffee plant (*Coffea arabica*), papaya (*Carica papaya*), numerous species of *Bougainvillea*, cinnamon (*Cinnamomum ceylanicum*), (*Parmentiera cereifera*) and mimosa (*Mimosa spegazzinii*). In the **Serra della Regione** (glasshouse of the regions), there are potted specimens of (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) (the traveller's palm) and various species of *Anthurium*, *Codiaeum*, *Pandanus* and other plants from tropical and equatorial climes. Two smaller glasshouses are located alongside this one, housing orchids and carnivorous plants respectively. Also notable is the collection of succulents contained in the similarly titled glasshouse, amongst which we find specimens of *Echinocactus grusonii* of considerable dimensions.

History of Palermo

Palermo was founded in the 8th century BC by Phoenician traders around a natural harbour on the northwestern coast of Sicily. The Phoenician name for the city may have been *Zîz*, but Greeks called it *Panormus*, meaning all-port, because of its fine natural harbour. Palermo remained a Phoenician city until the First Punic War (264-241 BC), when Sicily fell under Roman rule. The Roman period was one of comparative calm, Palermo coming under the provincial administration of Syracuse. When the Roman Empire was split, Sicily and Palermo came under the rule of the Eastern Byzantine Empire.

By 878 all of Sicily, except for a few Byzantine enclaves near Taormina, was controlled by the Saracens. In 905 they captured those too. The Arab rulers moved Sicily's capital to Palermo where it has been ever since. Under Muslim's dominion, Palermo became an important commercial and cultural center; a flourishing city broadly known in all the Arab world, it is said to have more than 300 mosques. But they were also years of tolerance: Christians and Jews were permitted to follow their own credo. In 1060 the Normans launched a crusade against the Muslim emirate of Sicily, taking Palermo on January 10, 1072 and the whole island by 1091. The resulting blend of Norman and Arab culture fostered a unique hybrid style of architecture as can be seen in the Palatine Chapel, the Church San Giovanni degli Eremiti (see picture above) and the Zisa. In 1194 Sicily fell under the control of the Holy Roman Empire. Palermo was

the preferred city of the Emperor Frederick II. At that time it was the third largest city in Europe after London and Paris. After an interval of Angevin rule (1266-1282), Sicily came under the house of Aragon and later, in 1479, the kingdom of Spain.

Sicily's unification (1734) with the Bourbon-ruled kingdom of Naples as the kingdom of the Two Sicilies inflicted a devastating blow on the elite of Palermo, as the city was reduced to just another provincial city, the royal court residing in Naples. Palermo rebelled in 1848 and held out against the Neapolitan crown until May 1849. The Italian Risorgimento and Sicily's annexation (1860) to the kingdom of Italy gave Palermo a second chance. It was once again the administrative center of Sicily, and there was a certain economic and industrial development. Palermo survived almost the entire fascist period unscathed, but during the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 it suffered heavy damage. The importance of Palermo got another boost when Sicily became an autonomous region with extended self-rule in 1947.



La Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti



Row after row of cactus species



Ceiba Speciosa - Kapok



Echinocactus grusonii





Fountains

The Moreton Bay Fig is an evergreen tree that can reach heights of 60 m (200 ft). The trunk can be massive, with thick, prominent buttressing, and reach a diameter of 2.4 m (8 ft). The rough bark is grey-brown, and marked with various blemishes. It is monoecious: each tree bears functional male and female flowers. As implied by its specific epithet, it has large, elliptic, leathery, dark green leaves, 15–30 cm (6–12 in) long, and they are arranged alternately on the stems. The leaves and branches bleed a milky sap if cut or broken. The figs are 2–2.5 cm (0.75–1 in) in diameter, turning from green to purple with lighter spots as they ripen. Ripe fruit may be found year round, [although more abundant from February to May. Although edible, they are unpalatable and dry.

The characteristic "melting" appearance of the Moreton Bay fig is due to its habit of dropping aerial roots from its branches which on reaching the ground thicken into supplementary trunks which help to support the great weight of its crown.

It is a rainforest plant and in this environment more often grows in the form of an epiphytic strangler vine than that of a tree. When its seeds land in the branch of a host tree it sends aerial, 'strangler' roots down the host trunk, eventually killing the host and standing alone.

Its roots are surface feeding and it is therefore quite susceptible to the compacting of earth around its trunk, which is why in many parks and gardens these trees are fenced off. It is water hungry and like many Australian trees should not be planted in urban environments where its roots may damage piping, nor in areas where water is scarce.



Ficus macrophylla (*Ficus magnolioides*)

Pleistodontes frogatti, the fig wasp that pollinates the Moreton Bay fig. Figs have an oblique mutualism with fig wasps, (*Agaonidae*); figs are only pollinated by fig wasps, and fig wasps can only reproduce in fig flowers. Generally, each fig species depends on a single species of wasp for pollination. The wasps are similarly dependent on their fig species in order to reproduce.



Ficus macrophylla



Ceiba Speciosa



Dioon edule. A cycad native to Mexico, also known as palma de la Virgen



The Aquarium

BEALTAINE

May Day is another cross-quarter day like Saint Brigid's Day. It's the first day of summer. May pole dances are held all over the world. In Ireland bonfires on hilltops were common and are being revived with summer festivals. The most famous bonfire in Ireland was held at The Hill of Uisneach, an historical site in Co. Westmeath located near the village of Ballymore. The Hill of Uisneach is the Omphalos or Navel of "mother" Ireland as the island was conceived and so named for. Ireland is named for the woman Éire or Éiru. At Uisneach is the Ail na Míreann or Stone of Division in the form of a quincunx. The quincunx is Latin for the Irish concept--*cúige*--or province, which divides Ireland in five provinces with Mí in the middle, Uladh north, Mumhan south, Connacht west and Laighean east. The bonfire at Uisneach announced the start of summer. (1ú Bealtine, 1st of May)



Located on the side of the hill is the 'Cat Stone' said to resemble a cat. Legend says that the Mother Goddess Erui who gave her name to the island of Ireland is buried underneath the cat stone.

The leaf of the mountain ash or rowan tree which along with primroses and buttercups were often hung across the outside door and window sills at Bealtaine.)



Caltabellotta - 12 miles from Trapani. Regarded as one of Sicily's most beautiful medieval mountain villages. (Photo: M. O'Sullivan)

AN EXPERIMENT WITH *MASDEVALLIA BARLAEANA* RCHB. F.

I received the plant from Ian Millichip on February 2nd, 2004.

First, I measured each leaf ; they were as follows:

8 by 1.5 cms
7 by 1.4 cms.
6 by 1.2 cms.

7 by 1.2 cms.
7 by 1.5 cms. (tip brown)
6.5 by 1.2 cms.

There were two, small new shoots on the plant.

4.2 by 1.1 cms.
2.5 by c.0.5 cms.

After consulting “BASIC ORCHIDS” I placed the plant on a South West facing bathroom window.

On April 16th 2004 I placed the tiny plant outside hanging on a sheltered North facing wall (as in below photo.)

By September 30th there were fifteen healthy leaves on the plant. An increase of nine leaves.

In August 2005 there were twenty-six leaves on the plant. The average measurement of the new leaves was 5cm. by 2 cm. I intend to leave the plant outdoors in the same position in the hope that a flower may develop. The plant has thrived outdoors.



Part two of the experiment

Ian suggested that I split the plant and see what happens. On December 17 2005 I split the plant in two. Plant ‘A’ had 14 leaves ranging in length from 3cm-5cm and width 1-2cm.

Plant ‘B’ had 12 leaves with similar dimensions to Plant ‘A’. I placed ‘A’ on a North facing wall and plant ‘B’ in the sunniest part of the garden. I left the two plants to

While keeping plant B in a south facing position I hung it on a small apple tree where it got some shade from direct sunlight. By summer of 2007 plant B was dead. Plant A was steadily producing new leaves.

To my great surprise and of course delight a flower spike appeared in late September 2009.

The flower opened during the last week of October and lasted into early December.

At the same time a second flower spike appeared however that flower dropped off after a week. I don't understand why this happened as the first spike had the same amount of exposure to wind and rain. The leaf count is back up to nineteen and the size of the leaves is the same as it was at the start of the experiment.

Conclusion.

It would appear that *Masdevallia barlaeana* likes a cold north facing position with no sun at all. It took five years to flower. This is of course only what I found, other experiments may prove differently. It has to be said that neither of the plants got any care except for the odd drop of water when I remembered to do so.

Update:

The severe weather we had did damage the leaves of the plant. They went very soggy and many of them fell off, there are five left on the plant. The roots look quite green so I will wait and see if the plant will recover.

ÙNA BREATHNACH



Continued from page 3

Sicily is today an autonomous region of Italy. Of all the regions of Italy, Sicily covers the largest land area at 25,708 square km (9,926 sq mi) and currently has just over five million inhabitants.

The Province of Munster in Ireland, by comparison, is 39,600 square km (15,290 square mi.) Sicily is only two-thirds the size of Munster.

Sicily (Italian and Sicilian: Sicilia, Si-chee-lia) is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and an autonomous region of Italy. Minor islands around it are also considered to be part of Sicily.

Sicily has its own rich and unique culture, especially with regard to the arts, music, literature, cuisine, architecture and language, having given birth to some of the greatest and most influential people in history. The Sicilian economy is largely based on agriculture (mainly orange and lemon orchards); this same rural countryside has attracted significant tourism in the modern age as its natural beauty is highly regarded. Sicily also holds importance for archeological and ancient sites such as the Necropolis of Pantalica and the Valley of the Temples.

Sicily's location means that it has a Mediterranean climate with mild to warm, wet winters and warm to hot, dry summers. Sicily produces more wine than New Zealand, Austria and Hungary combined, but was previously known mainly for fortified Marsala wines. In recent decades the wine industry has improved, new winemakers are experimenting with less-known native varieties, and Sicilian wines have become better known. The best known local varietal is Nero d'Avola, named for a small town not far from Syracuse; the best wines made with these grapes come from Noto, a famous old city close to Avola. Sicily is now the second largest wine producer of Italy's 20 regions

LTM



The flag of Sicily was first adopted in 1282, after the Sicilian Vespers of Palermo. It is characterized by the presence of the *triskelion* (trinacria) in its middle, the (winged) head of Medusa and three wheat ears. The three bent legs are supposed to represent the three points of the island Sicily itself.

ORCHID LEAF SPOTTING: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

One of the most frequently asked questions on orchid health is what causes leaf spotting? Leaf spots can appear en masse virtually overnight or gradually increase in numbers over weeks leaving the grower perplexed as what to do.

Spotting occurs where plant cells have died usually from fungal or sometimes viral infections. Fungal spores are abundant in the air and if there is poor air circulation they will settle on a leaf surface and usually in cool temperatures these will “germinate” and penetrate into the leaf feeding on the plant cells before killing them and then fruiting to produce more spores thus spreading the disease. Growing plants too cool also stresses the plant making it more susceptible to the invasion.

Any minor leaf abrasions also assist entry. Given these conditions the worst thing you could then do is to spray the leaves with water as it will greatly increase spore germination and spread them over the plant. Immature leaf tips such as those on Cattleyas are soft and vulnerable to fungi. The other route of fungal infection is via the root system. Bark contains increasing numbers of fungi as it undergoes the natural process of decay.

However if the bark is rotting, which usually happens after about three years, and it then it is kept cold and wet this creates the “perfect storm” for fungi and also bacteria to infect through the weakened root system.

So to prevent fungal spotting give plenty of fresh air on mild days even during winter. Do not mist when the weather is cool and always use fresh bark for your potting mix. If fungal spotting appears on leaves the first thing to do is to remove and destroy those leaves infected to prevent the spread of spores. It is worthwhile isolating the plant from your collection for a few weeks until it has recovered.

However if most leaves are spotted and getting worse then the only alternative is to use a fungicide though I personally have never had to resort to one. If you use a fungicide (Phyosan 20 is often referenced) remember do not to spray it indoors as that can be hazardous to your health. Some systemic fungicides are



available which can simply be watered in without spraying.

It should also be considered that some genera are notoriously prone to fungal leaf spotting for example Brassias, Oncidiums, Lycastes, Coelogyne and Zygopetalum whereas others are more resistant such as Cymbidium and Pleiones. The next class of pathogen causing spots that we shall now examine are viruses.

Virus infections are virtually unknown in wild orchid populations. Unfortunately they are widely distributed in cultivation. **Transmission chiefly occurs by the inoculation of virus containing sap into the sap of a healthy plant via cutting tools or sap-sucking insects.**

Virus infection unlike fungal or bacterial diseases is untreatable. It must be understood that all parts of the plant will contain the virus (including flowers), so it is pointless removing infected leaves or keikis as a means of control which can be successful with fungal infections. There is no alternative but to destroy an infected plant. Interestingly seed produced by virused orchids is typically virus-free and so infection is not transmissible to the next generation.

Unfortunately it is not always possible to conclusively visually diagnose whether an infection is due to virus or fungus and indeed spotting can arise due to purely cultural problems such as high salt build up from overfeeding. However there are some helpful indicators to discriminate between viral and fungal

infection. If leaf-spotting does occur on a number of your plants within a short period especially after spraying or repotting it is most likely due to a fungus. Virus infection appears more slowly and is signified by distinctive foliar symptoms which include diamond or chevron “V”- shaped patterns, concentric rings (i.e. rings within rings) or bright yellow mottling (mosaics) or yellow flecks along the leaf veins. On older leaves these markings will have developed as sunken brown markings on both sides of the leaf. Malformed growth should also flag suspicion as should colour-breaking in flowers. Note however that young leaves particularly those of Cymbidiums may possess yellow streaks but these will change to a healthy green as the growth matures. This will never happen if a virus at work.

Precautions that will help keep your collection virus-free:

1. Never buy or retain plants with the symptoms described for viruses. Afterwards remain vigilant with newly introduced plants.
2. **Always** sterilise a cutting tool (e.g. secateurs) after use **between each** plant. A cutting implement will often be required for plant division at re-potting or when dead-heading flower stems. Sterilising can be achieved by simply immersing the cutting blade in 1 part household bleach diluted in 3 parts water for 10 minutes. After this process, remember to rinse the bleach away with water. Alternatively swab the blade in alcohol and flame for about 30 seconds. It would also be good practice to wash

your hands or even wear latex gloves each time a plant is repotted and dispose of the compost each time also. Yes, all this seems laborious but is absolutely effective.

3. **NEVER** re-pot an orchid using compost which has previously been used to grow another orchid in. The same rule applies to using pots, unless the pot has been sterilised first. Orchid viruses are remarkably stable and can remain infec-

tive for weeks in the environment outside the plant.

4. **Eliminate** sap-sucking insects especially aphids which can carry virus from plant to plant.

5. Try not to grow plants too closely together or allow water drainage from one plant onto another. ♦

SHANE KERR

“When we stopped to rest and Tony tried to figure out what was wrong with his compass, I asked him what he thought it was about orchids that seduced humans so completely that they were compelled to steal them and worship them and try to breed new and specific kinds of them and then be willing to wait for nearly a decade for one of them to flower. 'Oh, mystery, beauty, unknowability, I suppose, ' he said, shrugging. 'Besides, I think the real reason is that life has no meaning. I mean, no obvious meaning. You wake up, you go to work, you do stuff. I think everybody's always looking for something a little unusual that can preoccupy them and help pass the time'.”

Susan Orlean
The Orchid Thief

The Easter Orchid, *Cattleya mossiae* - Pollinia Front Cover Photo

Cattleya mossiae was the second unifoliate *Cattleya* species discovered after *Cattleya labiata*, and it caused a sensation when it was introduced into the horticultural world in Europe in 1836. Unlike *C. labiata*, which was scarce or unavailable, *C. mossiae* plants were plentiful and anyone who had money could buy them.

Cattleya mossiae also had large, showy flowers with four or five flowers per spike and multiple leads, so a single plant in a 10-inch pot could produce 20 or more flowers. They were ideal for exhibition at flower shows where everyone saw them. Between 1865 and 1913, the Royal Horticultural Society gave its coveted awards, including 37 Awards of Merit and 16 First Class Certificates, to 53 *C. mossiae* clones. The number of named clones of *C. mossiae* is almost endless and there were already more than 150 recorded in the literature by 1900.

Much loved in its native Venezuela, *C. mossiae* was given the honor of being named the country's national flower.

A CAUTIONARY TALE OF SCALE INSECTS AND THE DARK ARTS!

On reading a recent article in *Pollinia* about scale insect, it immediately brought to mind my own experiences with these sinister beasts.

It was on a fine evening in spring of last year that I discovered to my horror that dreaded scale insects were gorging themselves like vampires upon my orchids. I could not get rid of them. No incantations or spells could exorcise my plants or garlic and silver crosses banish them.

I had read of Victorian professional gardeners who anointed the insects with cotton buds dipped in methylated spirits and of soft soap solutions applied by the light of the full moon using brushes made from the manes of unicorns collected on solstice eve! But these dated efforts were to no avail when I tried them!

I wandered despondently over to my local garden centre and there I poured forth my tale of woe to the horticulturist who chuckled when he heard of my efforts.

"All that rubbish of meths and soft soap went out with the Indians."

"What ?" I gasped !

"... Yeah, you can bump them off no problem these days." he chirped!

"How ?" I begged.

"Well, there's a few things out now " he continued such as Scott's "Bugclear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer" or "Bayer's Provado Ultimate Bug Killer."

" So no more of that ridiculous Victorian rubbish then?" I gasped!

" yep!" he snapped " they didn't really work anyway!"

" like hand spraying orchids everyday when its easy to set up a very high humidity for them instead ?" I asked

" yep exactly... "

and he was right .



I learned that to use these modern chemicals, you simply dilute them in water and pour into the pots at the recommended volumes according to pot size e.g. a 10 cm pot might require 50ml. They act systemically being taken up through the roots and into the leaf sap. So they must not be sprayed onto the plants, a feature which means they are less hazardous to use indoors.

When using **BUGCLEAR ULTRA VINE WEEVIL KILLER** you must remember to use the product including “Ultra” in the product name because this is the one effective against scale insect as well as all developmental stages of vine weevil, whitefly, greenfly, black fly, mealy bugs and thrips.

It is recommended to treat your plants twice a year.

After using these insecticides on my infested orchids the scale insect infestation was eliminated and my orchids have never looked healthier. So for me it is good bye to the dark arts of gothic Victoriana and hello to the 21st century!

Enjoy your orchids!



TOMMY DORAN



JANUARY PHOTO PUZZLE WINNERS

We had eight Members who responded to the Mystery Photo in the last issue and correctly identified the creature as *Phycodurus eques* - the leafy sea dragon.

I had originally intended a book prize for the first entry to appear in my email inbox, but have decided that every winner will receive a prize. Be patient—they will be sent to:

Noreen Mulligan
Ian Millichip
Tom Doran
Scott Macnaughton

Martine Tong
Howard Frost
Petra Janssen
Ika Peiler

MASON'S SECRET GARDEN

You might not expect to find that Perry Mason lived in Fiji or to hand over \$12 to wander a plantation in which he grew a world-class collection of orchids.

But Raymond Burr, the Canadian-born actor who played that most famous of television attorneys (and, later, the eponymous wheelchair-bound detective in *Ironside*), always referred to Fiji as his second home.

He loved the privacy and sense of distance the islands afforded him; like many gay actors working in the homophobic Hollywood studio system of the 1950s and 1960s, he was forced to lead a secretive life.

In 1965, he purchased Naitauba, a 1600ha private island in the Lau group. It must have seemed as far away as another planet.

He also bought a South Seas-style plantation house surrounded by substantial gardens about 20 minutes by road north from Nadi International Airport.

It became a kind of transit stop for Burr and his overseas friends.

In 1977 he opened a 20ha nursery, the Garden of the Sleeping Giant, closer to the airport, to hybridise orchids.

He was a keen grower of this dainty flower and, with his partner Robert Benevides, hybridised an estimated 1500 varieties before leaving Fiji in 1983.

One was named for Barbara Hale, the actress who played his secretary Della Street in the Perry Mason series.

Today there are few reminders that the nursery and its plantation were once Burr's domain (surely a missed marketing opportunity) but the garden makes for a delightful stroll, even in high-noon heat.

It is a botanic wonderland on a steepish block, entered via a mesh-covered walkway lined with cultivated orchids - chartreuse, pink, creamy white, buttercup yellow - growing in pots perched randomly on rock walls, and perennial epiphytes that sprout from trees and stumps.

Each is gorgeous, fragile, with petals variously shaped like frilly slippers, tiny starfish and lunging spiders.

The estate then opens out via wooden boardwalks and stone paths to plantings of laden mango trees, frangipani and palms (including traveller palms with their fan-like fronds), groves of bamboo and a lovely feeling of wildness, with the forested foothills of the Nausori Highlands in the distance.

It's these hills that give the garden its esoteric name, as the corrugated ridge is said to resemble the body of a sleeping giant. Several round-circuit tracks loop from ponds so layered with waterlilies they form a floating carpet.

I climb, jungle-trek fashion, higher and higher as blue tiger butterflies circle my head. Amid the lush greenery, heliconia, birds of paradise, spiral ginger and flowering flame trees form explosions of vivid red and orange-gold.

The best way to extend the Burr-themed experience is to stay at Fiji Orchid, his original transit homestead, now run as a delightful six-bure resort in the gardens the actor once tended.

It's easy to imagine him, perhaps in a capacious floral shirt, pottering about. It is pretty certain Burr would approve of Fiji Orchid. His low white house, open to the breezes, has been nicely renovated but not glammed-up.

This is where guests can lounge under ceiling fans around the bar, eat on the small terrace (dubbed, perhaps a little wryly, as Raymond's Restaurant) or chat with manager Gordon Leewai, a former soccer star.

The house and the lovely freestanding guest *bures* are surrounded by bougainvillea, hibiscus, potted ferns and wild orchids.

There are mango trees overhanging the pool and parts of the garden are abundant with citrus fruit, custard apples, pawpaws and guava.

Six gardeners are needed to tend the estate with its 1000-plus varieties of plants. It's a flourishing universe of botanic life, just as Burr would have wanted

SUSAN KUROSAWA
THE FIJI TIMES

IRISH ORCHID SOCIETY
www.irishorchidsociety.org

•
POLLINIA
www.pollinia.org



Your Questions and Answers

QUESTIONS

A friend recommended I try a foliar feed on my orchids. Is this a good idea and would it be beneficial for them? They are in good condition and presently doing well.

Recently I bought a *Zygopetalum* orchid (John Banks x *intermedium*). Unfortunately it spent 5 days in the postal system from the U.K. but with some TLC seems to be ok. Two flowers had come off and a leaf. Do you have any tips to help me get the best out of it and ensure more flowers next year?

I hope to increase my stock of *Dendrobium nobile* using stem cuttings. What canes from the plant should I use and is there a preference in the time of year for trying it?

Thanks and I hope these questions may be useful for other *Pollinia* readers as well.

Yours Sincerely, **Carol Hardie**

ANSWERS

Foliar feeding is unnecessary for orchids and certainly none should not be applied during the winter months. Orchid leaves should never be sprayed with water or with diluted fertiliser except during warm weather otherwise fungal leaf spotting may arise.

Zygopetalums come from the mountainous regions of Brazil and their hybrids such as yours are very robust and temperature tolerant. They prefer day temperatures between 17°C and 25°C with an important night time drop to between 7°C and 10°C. In fact some can take temperatures close to freezing for short periods. Therefore your *Zygopetalum* should do well grown at ordinary indoor temperatures. Give it full light during winter and bright indirect sunshine during the summer. Never spray the leaves of *Zygopetalums* as they are notoriously prone to fungal leaf spots, giving them plenty of fresh air should help prevent this. If your plant grows well next year but refuses to flower, it is recommended that you put it in a cooler room for a few

weeks. Zygotetulum flowers produce the most magnificent rose-scented perfume!

It is unusual to propagate Dendrobiums from true stem cuttings. The most convenient way, particularly for *nobile* types, is to detach plantlets called *keikis* which are produced from stem nodes which have not produced flowers. If you select stems of about three years old which contain nodes that have not flowered then these can be selected for stem cuttings by treating as follows. In June, cut off the selected stem from the base. Then slice off sections between the nodes leaving two or three nodes per section and then half bury them in bark or better still a moss and perlite mix. In about three months some of the cuttings should have rooted and produced shoots and don't repot them for about two years. ♦

Thank you to Neutrog Fertilisers Ireland.

The Irish Orchid Society wishes to thank Niall Reynolds the Managing Director of **Neutrog Ireland** for his presentation at the February meeting in Glasnevin.

Neutrog is an Australian organic fertiliser company which has recently set up a manufacturing plant in Ireland. They supply a variety of slow-release fertiliser pellets most of which are derived from composted chicken manure blended with seaweed both of Irish origin. One of their products named "Strike Back" is specifically recommended for orchids and is endorsed by several Australian Cymbidium orchid societies.

Niall gave a concise and informative presentation on the background to Neutrog and their product range. He kindly gave his talk free of charge and offered generous free samples of his fertilisers to members.

The Society has promised to give him feedback on the performance of these at the end of the growing season.

Important: Members are urged to follow the manufacturer's recommended pellet dose per pot and not to use them on young plants. I would also be cautious in testing them on any precious epiphytic orchids until we have gained experience.

However I have full confidence in using the fertilisers on Cymbidiums as they have been highly recommended by Cymbidium societies.

Email: info@neutrog.ie www.neutrog.com.au

SHANE KERR

ANIMAL OF THE YEAR IS A BEE



Foiled again! The long-horned bee gets up close to a spider orchid. Photo: Nico Vereecken

One of Switzerland's 580 species of wild bee has been chosen as Pro Natura's animal of the year, the nature protection organisation announced on Tuesday.

Eucera nigrescens, whose German name translates as long-horned bee, is described by Pro Natura as a "furry pollen taxi". It plays a vital role in pollinating the late spider orchid.

The orchid fools the bee by imitating the shape and smell of the female. The male comes along to mate, and receives a load of pollen instead, which it passes on to the next plant it visits.

Pro Natura said the choice of the long-horned bee with its highly specialised relationship with the orchid was designed to illustrate the importance of millions of insects for biodiversity.

It said 45 per cent of all wild bees are on the red list of endangered species in Switzerland. If they were to disappear, many plant species would disappear too.

The United Nations has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity.

Pro Natura has launched its own campaign under the slogan: Biodiversity – every species counts!

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/>



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 10th and 11th - 11am to 5pm

The Glasnevin National Botanic Gardens Spring Orchid Fayre

Not to be missed! This highly popular weekend event open to the general public will again be attended by **Burnhams and David Stead Nurseries** who will have a diverse range of orchids for sale. If you wish to order a particular plant from them for collection at the Fayre you may do so by contacting them in advance.

Guided tours of the botanic gardens orchid collection and lectures on topical subjects will take place on both days

The Irish Orchid Society will also be present to offer advice, exhibit show plants, conduct raffles and of course promote membership. **Admission Free.**

Irish Orchid Society members will be granted an exclusive show preview on the evening of **Friday, April 9th, 7pm.**

Members are urged to bring along their plants on the Friday evening for display over the weekend and to enter our annual competition for judging on the Saturday morning.

*Opening hours should be confirmed with the Botanic Gardens (Tel: 01 8570909)

May 10th - 8pm -

Marie Hourigan will conduct an exclusive tour of the **Glasnevin National Botanic Gardens** orchid collection and view other items of interest. Attending members should congregate first in the lecture theatre where the monthly meetings are normally held.

June 14th - 8pm

Annual General Meeting
Everyone welcome!

June 29th - *6:30 Dublin North Bull Island Field Trip

The annual pilgrimage to North Bull Island will be led again by Ireland's "Mr. Orchids" himself, Brendan Sayers.

This is a wonderful way to relax on a summers evening and welcome the return of our native orchids which are to be seen in abundance in this most special of locations. Members should meet in the car park at the visitors centre.

*Time to be confirmed.

Butera28

Via Butera, Palermo, Sicily, Italy
 info@butera28.it www.butera28.it

In the heart of the historic Kalsa district of Palermo, this elegant, Sicilian-style palazzo is ideal for short or extended visits.



There are nine apartments located in a beautifully renovated 18th century palazzo by the sea, the last home of Prince Tomasi di Lampedusa, author of the world famous novel *The Leopard*. Each apartment (some with sea view) has a private entrance and feature beautiful antique Sicilian furniture, fully equipped kitchen, bath, hardwood or tile floors, free Internet access, satellite TV, A/C in every room, and weekly cleaning service.

Butera 28 is within walking distance of the main artistic and touristic attractions, museums, churches, and the enchanting **Botanical Gardens**. The famous **Museo Internazionale delle Marionette** is doors away. Shops, restaurants, supermarkets are nearby. In the apartment you will find suggestions about where to eat and shop, along with maps and guide books.

For rates and availability, please contact Nicoletta Polo, owner, at the email address above.

BURNHAM NURSERIES



*Are pleased to be regular
 visitors to the
 Dublin Orchid Fayre!*

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We will be pleased to ship to Ireland, contact us for a quote or get together with your orchid friends to share the cost of delivery.

Forches Cross, Newton Abbot, Devon, England, TQ12 6PZ.

Tel: +44 1626 352233 mail@orchids.uk.com



IOS Member 'Electric Orchid' on Field Research in California