

TWO EXCITING IRISH DISCOVERIES

The green-flowered helleborine is one of Ireland's rarest orchids. Found in a variety of habitats and also in a variety of forms, it is elusive and seldom seen in numbers more than a dozen.

In 2015 Jackie O Connell, who previously presented an illustrated talk to the Irish Orchid Society, noticed an interesting plant when visiting an old friend in Co. Kildare. Although confident that it was the green flowered helleborine he had Brendan Sayers pay a visit and confirm the identification. It was indeed *Epipactis phyllanthes* and unusually in great numbers. The plants grew alongside a stream that flows through old demesne woodland on the property. A short time later access to the adjoining property expanded the population and estimates of flowering plants is close to 500 for the 2017 flowering season.



This is the first record for the green-flowered helleborine in Co. Kildare and the largest known population in Ireland or Great Britain. Another interesting point (a debatable point!) is that the population is best attributed to *Epipactis phyllanthes* var. *pendula* when other Irish populations are attributed to *Epipactis phyllanthes* var. *vectensis*.

The presence of so many plants will give the unusual opportunity to examine traits of the species that have been documented from much smaller populations and help add more knowledge to this seldom seen species.



Dactylorhiza fuchsii × *Gymnadenia densiflora*

The second cause for celebration is the identification of a hybrid between the common spotted orchid and the dense flowered fragrant orchid. This occurred when Brian Kelly of the National Botanic Gardens was showing some smart phone pictures of wild orchids in Co. Wicklow to Brendan Sayers. In the batch was a photograph of the seldom encountered hybrid. Hybrids between *Dactylorhiza* and *Gymnadenia* belong to the hybrid genus × *Dactyloдения*.

The hybrid do not have a commonly used hybrid combination so is identified by it parent cross, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* × *Gymnadenia densiflora*. ■

BRENDAN SAYERS

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A Rare Find—National Botanic Gardens

The National Botanic Gardens are pleased to announce a significant find in Ireland's botanical world. The green flowered helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthes*) is a rare Irish orchid confined to little more than a dozen sites on the island. Its rarity and variability makes for much debate among botanists and orchid lovers alike.

A new population, studied since it was first observed in 2015 by John (Jackie) O'Connell, is located on private property in Co. Kildare. Jackie is an enthusiastic naturalist and photographer and is well known for his wildflower meadow, which abounded with orchids, on the church grounds when he was Parish Priest in Caragh, Co. Kildare.

A further alert from the adjoining property led to what may be the largest population of green flowered helleborine ever recorded in Ireland or Britain. There were an estimated 500 flowering spikes in 2017.

A more detailed account of the study by staff at the Gardens in conjunction with the property owners and Jackie will appear in botanical news over the coming months.