

# **SHEFFIELD & DISTRICT ORCHID SOCIETY**

**NEWSLETTER**

**AUG/SEPT 2011**



**AUGUST PLANT OF THE MONTH  
PHRAGMIPEDIUM BESSEAE**

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## EDITORIAL

It's a while since we last had an editorial as space has been quite limited recently, but it is time for some comments.

The first is that this newsletter is a combined August/September issue. As there is no meeting at Ranmoor in September there won't be any content (and I can have more of a free month). Remembering to actually produce the newsletter was a challenge, and having had 2 months, it only reaches you with a few days to spare. Sorry!

The second is to formally apologise to Charles for calling him Silvia in last month's table show commentary. I'm sure that at some point in the future he will no doubt return the compliment.

# BUSINESS

The arrangements for the display at the Norfolk Heritage Park were discussed (and a decent display was mounted – see back cover). Our next display is at Lowdham for the EMOS show on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Ted is co-ordinating this, with setting up on the Saturday between 1-6pm, and Sunday 7-9am. Charles has volunteered to arrange the Chatsworth show in 2012. The date will be Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May (the week prior to Chelsea).

The November meeting will be a general ‘bring and buy’ sale of plant related items. Please take part – and bring some plants!

The Paph. Society are having the renowned Harold Koopowitz as speaker in January. Several packages are available for non-members to attend. Details on the BPS website.

Our monthly raffle is going well, with plants proving a popular pick. If you have spare divisions etc., please bring them along.

Theo Dengel has a large quantity of surplus Hortag that he used extensively in the past in the large warm/intermediate greenhouse on trays to help keeping the humidity up. It simply needs collecting from him – bring a sack! Please contact him first though.

## THE TABLE SHOW

John Garner volunteered for this month’s show, which was fairly thin – as could be expected for the time of year. He started with Den. Cassiope, which is a smaller growing *nobile* hybrid (*x moniliforme*). It had several clusters of medium sized white flowers with a purple centre. Rlc. Golf Green ‘Hair Pig’ was a medium sized flower, being light green with very frilly petals and lip. It is unusual to have frilly petals, and this is probably peloric. A small unnamed Cattleya type had a small yellow flower that was reminiscent of a daffodil – but very pretty just the same. Davidsonara (*Brassovola x Cattleya x Laelia x Prostechea*) Chief Green River had unusual green and red flowers.

Masd. *ignea* was a smallish plant with a single tall off-red flower, whereas *veitchiana* was more towards orange, still tall, with a couple more flowers to develop & open. *Catasetum sanquineum* was most unusual. It had a single spike with 3 plain green flowers that were upside down with a hood. It wasn’t known if this was a male or female flower. *Aeranthes citrana* was a plant we have seen before, and is now a decent specimen. The 2 growths had 10 spikes of tiny white flowers, although many were not yet fully open. It will be a picture in a couple of weeks.

Miltassia Royal Robe ‘Diplomat’ is a specimen plant with many growths at their peak supporting 8 spikes of patterned purple flowers. Miltonia Sunset Boulevard had a single small flower of yellow with a pink lip. Paph. Clair de Lune ‘EVB’ is an often seen plant noted for its tall spike and large white green flower. Phrag. *besseae* was a strong grower with a couple of good flowers, and was adjudged Plant of the Month (see front cover).

Doritis *pulcherrima* was a reasonable size for a small plant with a tall spike of small purple flowers. An unnamed plant had medium sized white flowers with an orange lip which created a pleasant strong colour mix. Phal. Little Princess was a small purple, and Phal. Hawaiian Dream was a tall large white with well spaced flowers. The discussion ended with Ascda. Meda Arnold, a well grown plant with a long spike with many scarlet flowers and many more buds to come. It should look a picture for another couple of months yet.

## **AUGUST PLANT OF THE MONTH**

### **PHRAGMIPEDIUM BESSEAE**

I have several plants of Phragmipedium *besseae*; however this is one of my oldest. I purchased it from Peter Tremain who ran Exmoor Orchids way back in April 1999, it never did get a clonal name just a number that referred to its petal spread of 7.5 cm, hence “C7.5”, however mine has reached 8cm.

I think by now everyone knows that all the orchids I grow are in an 8ftx6ft greenhouse at an intermediate temperature. I use various potting mixes however this one is grown in a mix of small rock wool cubes and sponge rock. **Derek Jackson**

## **GROWING HARDY ORCHIDS**

### **JEFF HUTCHINGS**

This lecture is suffixed “in a British garden” as obviously all orchids are hardy where they are natives. Hardy in this case means either planted outside, kept in a cold frame, or in a cold greenhouse. In many cases a combination is used. The myth that they are expensive and hard to grow is unfounded. They are now propagated by the thousand in European laboratories, and with many easy growing hybrids being propagated they are now in reach of the general public, and several mail order businesses stock them.

It is illegal to collect orchids from the wild – you can only do this with a license. Plants imported from Europe don’t need CITES and this is the main source of

Jeff's plants (Sweden & Germany). The conditions required are quite simple, however, experts often tend to over complicate their requirements from their natural habitat. Sunny borders, rockeries and raised beds, shady areas and unfertilised meadows are all quite adequate once you know a few simple facts about the type of plant that you want to grow, and this depends on the dormancy period. Getting this wrong means that heat is just as dangerous as severe frosts. 4 types of plant groups are found in the UK;

- a. Rhizome, winter dormant
- b. Finger tuber, winter dormant
- c. Oval tubers, summer dormant, winter green
- d. Psuedo bulbs, semi dormant

They generally prefer poor soils – that is the way that they have evolved. Neglect is part of the key to success, as it is easy to kill them with kindness. Some like limestone soils, others suffer through periods of drought and may well miss growing for a year (or more). Fungus isn't as vital to these plants as many will have us believe although it is useful to help germination. Gritty soils help drainage which is a major benefit.

Dactylorhizas are definitely garden worthy plants, and are some of the easiest to grow. This is a finger (dact) rooted (rhizome) plant that stores energy in the tuber to support the next years growth. Ideally these are planted in large clay pots buried in the ground to avoid drying out, especially in winter. They need to be damp at least, but not waterlogged. They will survive in a range of conditions from full shade to bright sun, and from pond margins to old meadows. You need to understand a bit more of the plants habitat to determine where to grow them. *fuchsii*, *purpurella* (northern bog orchid) and *praetermissa* (southern bog orchid) are UK natives from damp areas, *foliosa* is from Madeira, *elata* from North Africa, and *sambucina* from the alpine meadows.

Bletillas come from Japan and Asia, and have psuedobulbs. They flower in Spring/Summer, and benefit from more fertile soils to aid flowering – soil & loam is good. Sun and dappled shade is required. They spread outwards, and should be divided in summer to settle for winter. *striata* is the most common and cheapest and generally these are purple to white, with 'Soryu' being bluish, and 'Junpaka' white, *ochracea* is a yellow to cream species, and a growing number of hybrids is also available.

Cypripediums have a long rhizome mat of roots, and have long winter dormancy after dying back in the middle of summer. They flower usually between April and June. *calceolus* is the most famous – or is it infamous, and has been the subject of a covert reintroduction plan. This is a lime loving species (as the name suggests). Some of the other species can be difficult, but many of the hybrids are

quite easy to cultivate – Ulla Silkens is one of these, and can form a clump outdoors of over 100 blooms within 10 years. Generally the flowers are on short spikes and last up to 5 weeks if kept cool. Plants are best grown in pots buried in the garden to avoid drying out too much. They should be in a mix of bark, grit, perlite, pumice and leaf mould (beech). Feed can be Tomarite used fortnightly. Avoid winter rain to avoid compaction, and don't mulch. Easy species are the American *reginae* and *parviflorum*, and the Asian *macranthos* and *tibeticum*.

Wintergreen species are generally found in meadows, and are summer dormant. They start growing in the autumn, and shoot away in spring, flowering and setting seed then dying off as they are overcome by larger herbs. After 18 months in flask, they take 4-5 years to flower. They prefer free draining alkaline soils that are nutrient poor, and don't like being frozen in small pots. They are often naturalised in lawns, which means no mowing until July! There are a small range of British and European species available, with pyramids and twayblades mainly available. Try to buy them after at least 2 years in soil. Use slug pellets to avoid the plants succumbing to a tasty meal. *Orchis morio* (pyramid) is the easiest UK native along with *mascula* and *anthropophora*. The bee orchids are difficult to grow well and also propagate. They tend to disappear for a year when it suits them. *Ophrys apifera* is a UK native of chalk downs. A variation on the bees are the spider orchids (still *Ophrys*), and *fuciflora* and *sphegodes* are a selection. Sadly these can go dormant for up to 7 years! Other species such as *morisii* and *speculum* need a cold house to grow best as they hate the wet, but you also need to avoid winter sun to prevent drying – difficult plants. In the right areas they can grow well – as they do in the wild. They are small and interesting, but need some care, and are very slow to multiply.

Other hardy genera include *Platanthera bifolia*, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Himantoglossum hircinum* (lizard or goat orchid), as well as the more common *Epipactis palustris* & *gigantea*, and *Spiranthes cernua*.

The final group covered were the hardy *Calanthes*, and there are 6 species from Japan that fall into this category (and their hybrids). They are semi-evergreen plants that grow in mountain woodland alongside ferns and hostas. They grow well in an organic mix, and need a reasonable feed during growth. They flower as the leaves open. The best known are *sieboldii* - a yellow species, *tricarinata* – green with a red lip, and *reflexa* - pink.

In summary, they are easy growing and cheap to grow as long as a few simple guidelines are followed. Find out what conditions are required for the plants you want to grow, and follow them. Pots and raised beds are important. Avoid winter rain, but don't over protect them. Start with easier growing plants, preferably mature ones. When the bug strikes, but some more. Most of all enjoy growing them.

A few questions followed, and a good round of applause followed.

# SHOW THEME FOR CHATSWORTH 2012

This is the list of things I will need to put together for the new show display "THE ORCHID HUNTER". Please let me know if you can help and I will arrange a time to collect.

HUMAN SKELETON(S) or parts thereof. Not the one you're using now!

Someone must have one in the cupboard

LEATHER BOMBER STYLE JACKET

OLD SATCHELL

OLD TRILBY, HOMBURG or SOLAR TOPEE

OLD BOOTS

OLD BINOCULARS

OLD TROUSERS, PROBABLY MILITARY TYPE

OLD WOODEN BOXES/PACKING CRATES

OLD "STEAMER" TYPE TRUNK

OLD HARNESS BIT & PIECES

DEAD TREE

SPANISH MOSS

SPAGNUM MOSS

FERNS

IVY

BROMELIADS?

TREE FERN(S)

Oh! I almost forgot, ORCHIDS!!!!

**Charles Ford**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

### MONTHLY MEETINGS AT RANMOOR – 10AM

Oct 9<sup>th</sup> Ian Parsons – Cymbidiums

Nov 13<sup>th</sup> Bring and Buy

### OTHER SHOWS

Nov 13-20<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> WOC – Singapore (SDOS not exhibiting!)

Society website - [www.sheffieldorchids.org](http://www.sheffieldorchids.org)



Above: - The display at Norfolk Heritage Park

Below: - Ascocenda Meda Arnold

