

Region 25/9

Group Leaders: Don and Pauline Lawie,
P.O. Box 230, Babinda, Queensland 4861
Phone: 0740 671 577

Most people say they join a study group to learn. Are you learning from this Study Group? As most of our contributors live in epiphyte areas, if you are a terrestrial enthusiast, the best way to use our newsletter to learn is probably as a stimulant to what you can do independently. Have you ever attempted to describe an orchid, or what is taking place in that plant? Many plant books have a glossary, but for terms specific to orchids we really need a good orchid book. Our Study Group does not expect members to use scientific language when reporting their observations and their successes or otherwise in cultivation, but we could all extend our knowledge of orchids if we learned orchid-specific terms. If you make a significant discovery through your diligent observations, how will anyone ever know if you can't describe it with scientific accuracy?

A case in point occurred when Don and I last took a trip down the Russell River. There are *Dendrobiums* galore in the trees along the banks. They are predominantly *discolor*, but other little gems are to be found when in flower. Unfortunately, we haven't perfected a means of collecting a flower high in the trees, but we did get one from lower down. The difficulty was how to describe the differences between this flower and the *discolor* type. I haven't the know how to dissect the flower and had to go to a glossary to point up the easily seen differences. My study indicates that this flower does not conform to *Dockrill's* descriptions of any of the varieties of *D. discolor*, but it is probably not sufficiently different to matter. Because I can't describe it accurately, I'll just have to send the flower to an expert.

Our down river trip covered only about 4km. We travel very slowly for maximum viewing and it's a case of take lunch just in case we see something worth spending lots of time on. (Don't most SGAP outings fall into this category!) *D. discolor* is a mighty plant with pseudobulbs up to 5m, each carrying up to six inflorescences measuring a maximum of 60cm. A couple of specimen we saw in the tops of small trees had many inflorescences in full golden flower extending some distance on both sides of the tree - a magnificent sight. The *Cymbidium madidum* is not such a show off. The racemes of yellow or greenish buttercup flowers, also to 60cm, hang demurely below the erect strappy leaves. The strings of large globular seed pods from the previous year are an interesting feature of this orchid. As they often make their home in a basket fern, which itself is pretty spectacular, finding one, and there are many, is very rewarding. *Dockrillia teretifolia* is everywhere but is only conspicuous when flowering. The tepals are narrow and don't stay wide open but a plant with several racemes of bright white flowers is gorgeous. Other plants we enjoyed in flower were *D. mirbelianum*, (a real thrill as this rare beauty was the object of the trip) *D. smillieae*, still in bud, *Bulbophyllum schillerianum*, *Oberonia complinata* and a white flowered *Dendrobium* too high for positive identification. Not in flower were *Eria fitzalanii* and heaps of *Bulbophyllum baileyi*; one had a seed pod, the first I have seen. We know there were many we did not see, but when a mighty *D. Discolor* in full flower catches the eye the eye stays caught.

Because it is a shorter journey of only an hour or two, we mostly take our boat trips up river to check on many plants we know, to enjoy their flowering or get a positive identification. Mangroves supporting a large population of *Dockrillia teretifolia* dominate at first, then the fresh water rainforest trees take over and the orchid species is more varied, but not so easy to see.

Next year the ASGAP Conference is being held in Brisbane and one of the post conference tours will include a journey up this River. If you don't need great showy flowers, and do enjoy looking at the incredibly diverse size and shape of orchid plants, this place would be hard to beat. I haven't yet done a cross reference on what has flowered here at the end of July, but as temperature and rainfall become increasingly impossible to predict there's bound to be something to wonder at.

Has your interest in orchids also extended your knowledge of grasses, sedges and ground covers? I have had to learn to identify some trees, as it is infuriating when Don is pointing out a plant and I don't know a *Ristantia* from a *sonneratia*. Unlike birds, the plants don't move, but the boat does.

Two of our members have reported, in fact shown, success with propagating *Phaius tankervilleae* by layering a flower stalk. Have you experimented with other terrestrials? One Atherton Tableland member has unsuccessfully tried *Spathoglottis plicata* but she hasn't given up. She's becoming enthusiastic about terrestrials after reading in the Orchid Review that a mix of 50% sand, 45% soil, 5% peat moss and a little blood and bone is good; she is also keen to try a suggestion from the same source of putting dormant tubers into a plastic bag with a banana skin for two weeks to induce flowering.

Margaret Bradhurst tells us: "I seem to have spent most of my time as usual crawling around on my hands and knees either looking for or photographing terrestrials and to a lesser extent epiphytes. I am trying to build up a photographic record of the orchids in Sutherland Shire. This includes the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park, Botany (South) National Park and the Sutherland Shire bushland reserves. My latest count was 77 species so far, having found a few new (to me) species of *Pterostylis* and others recently. I have a feeling 'new' findings from here on are going to be a rather rare occurrence!" What a great project, Margaret. Keep looking. A fishing writer used to say, the man who catches the most fish is the man who spends the most time fishing; it's the same with orchids.

TOWNSVILLE CONFERENCE - DON:

We really enjoyed our first SGAP conference in Townsville in late June-early July. Living in at the Grammar School took me back more than four decades to my long-ago boarding school days, but it is the best way to really be a part of the whole conference, and totally eliminates the difficulties of accommodation, meals and transport to and from the venue. Speakers each night were varied and interesting, and the day trips illuminated what we had heard the previous night. Townsville is a user-friendly city, and the Townsville SGAP members pulled out all stops to ensure that we all obtained maximum benefit from the occasion. We have visited Townsville numerous times, but SGAP showed us places and plant communities we had never suspected could be found there, and moreover, being SGAP, explained why and how the plants are there and how to identify them and recognise them when again seen. It was

educational also to meet so many other SGAPers and join in numerous enthusiastic discussions about our native plants.

We didn't see a lot of orchids, but time of year has a lot to do with that. Townsville is home to a wide range of both terrestrials and epiphytes and at least we now know where to look for them on our next visit. We also had a chance to publicise our Study Group, and were very pleased to sign up two new, and one ex-member. Welcome to Jeanette and Marjorie, and again to Ann.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT: (as required by ASGAP rules for Study Groups)
Financial year 1/7/97 - 30/6/98:

Income: Subscriptions/donations	\$130.00
Bank Interest	0.65
Total Income:	\$130.65
Balance brought forward 30/6/97	377.60
Total funds:	\$508.25
Less expenses 97/98 (postage,printing)	81.95
Balance in Hand (Bank) as at 30/6/98	<u>\$426.30</u>

Our income exceeded our expenses this year, due to the fact that only three newsletters were issued as opposed to four in each of the two preceding years. This was due to our personal circumstances; I was overseas for some time in the early part of the year, and then Pauline was away for three months looking after her Mother. We've had some very pleasant correspondence from members, and enough in contributions to keep the newsletter going, but we have to admit that it has a tendency to be a North Queensland Study Group. We don't want that to happen. We are very keen to print news from the rest of Australia, but if we don't get it, we can't print it. We read each issue of the State Bulletins, but orchids don't exactly grab the headlines there.

Our Study Group suffers from shortage of membership. If we had more members to bounce ideas back and forth to stimulate discussion, either via the newsletter or amongst themselves, we might be able to come up with some real study activities. Bill Payne, the Editor of Australian Plants, was in Townsville and offered us all the help he can give. Do we have any original work that is worth sending to Bill, preferably accompanied by good quality photos? I'm sure that some PR in Australian Plants would attract new members. If any reader of this letter has an idea of something that we could send to Bill, we'd be glad to consider it.

ENVIROSPRAY: We have quite a few *Dendrobium discolor* around our house. They grow like weeds and throw kiekies (aerial plants) very freely. A big plant recently became overshadowed by rampant growth of a Matchbox bean vine (*Entada phaseoloides*) and responded by actually dropping kiekies into the surrounding shrubs. We collected them and tied them to more suitable trees and in doing so I found a good tip to pass on: I used grafting tape to tie the kiekies to the new host trees and found it to be soft on the plants, easy to handle, almost invisible, and will biodegrade by the time that the orchids have established themselves. A roll of grafting tape is very long, and so is economical to use.

This para was headed Enviropray! Our numerous Golden orchids promised much this year and we were looking forward to a display to match that down the River. However, almost every bud was destroyed

by insects before they even became flowers. This in spite of Pauline's rigorous programme of alternate spraying with various fertilisers and insecticides, though a lot of our Golden's are a bit high to reach. We have had word of a new spray called Enviro-spray. Through smell and taste it deters, but doesn't kill, all insects so eliminating the big bugbear of insecticides - the killing of insects friendly to our plants. We'd like to report on this spray. If you have any experiences, positive or negative, on Enviro-spray, tell us about them, and we'll pass the info on via a future newsletter.

TAENIOPHYLLUM MUELLERI: A Tableland member told how she was shown the tiniest orchid imaginable recently: A thickened twig (couldn't call it a branch even) was lying on the table. Told to go and have a look at the orchid there, all she could see was the stick. Closer inspection found lots of roots, but no leaves, and then into focus came the flowers, less than $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of a little fingernail. It was identified as the leafless orchid *Taeniophyllum muelleri* which grows around Atherton in the Lake Eacham vicinity and further up Cape York Peninsula. Our member says that one would need to be wearing magnifying glasses to spot this orchid in nature, but nevertheless she will be on the lookout for it.

PSEUDOVANILLA FOLIATA: In the last newsletter we reported finding a specimen of this orchid. I've just been up the creek to check on it and it has survived the wet season well. There are four separate main stems climbing up the dead *Harungana* tree (exotic and intentionally killed in an eradication attempt), each stem about 10mm diameter. The tree is broken at a height of about six metres and the orchid stems are waving about in the air, quite green at the ends and obviously looking for support. There are just two small trees nearby that it may find - an *Aceratium megalospermum* and a *Cryptocarya* sp. I'll keep an eye on things and hope to be able to report our first sight of this remarkable orchid in flower by the end of this year. My sowing of seed from this plant has not produced any results but I live in hope, particularly for the seeds I put on dead *Alphitonia* and *Carnarvonia* trees, and a big clump of *Dendrobium moschatum* (exotic) growing on a dead Jacaranda stump.

APHYLLORCHIS ANOMALA: We were about to wrap up this newsletter with some snappy comments and print it, but the printer had other ideas. Then, on the night of Sunday, 30th August, we had a cloudburst in our area. I measured twenty inches of rain over 15 hours, followed by another seven inches in the next 24 hours. We get that sort of phenomenon here from time to time and it causes little damage, except that our water supply gets washed out of the creek. (What about the first flowering of my *D. speciosum*! I didn't get a photograph.P.) Pauline chose to fix it this time, and was rewarded by finding a metre high orchid inflorescence beside the pipeline, in an area of shallow soil on a steep granite slope dominated by Johnstone River Hardwood (*Backhousia bancroftii*) trees above the steeply falling creek. This is one of the areas where we found numerous *Apostasia wallichii* plants earlier this year, again as a result of fixing the water supply. We have yet to study the *Aphyllorchis* flowers in detail, but are confident of making a definite identification of species to corroborate a population found by Bianca Jago at the Boulders, near Babinda, a couple of years ago. This orchid had not previously been found at low altitudes and needless to say we are very excited at finding yet another of nature's gems right here in our own backyard!