



# The Hardy Orchid Society Newsletter

No. 4 April 1997

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### Introduction

Dear Members,

I feel as I write this that Spring is with us at last! The pleasure of the snowdrops and daffodils could almost make the winter worthwhile. The early flowering orchids in the greenhouse herald the real rewards of months of concern and cultivation. I hope there will be some nice plants to take to our annual show in May and look forward to seeing other members plants there. The show and next meeting is not long away and I hope many members will be able to attend, do not be put off by the fact that it is an AGM as this will only be a small part of the meeting.

Carol Dash

5th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. SATURDAY MAY 10th 1997

Richard Manuel

The AGM this year will be at Pershore College of Horticulture, starting at 10.30am. A copy of the minutes from last year's meeting is included with this newsletter, please bring this with you.

Nominations are invited for the following Committee Posts: Chairman; Vice-chairman; Secretary; Treasurer; Membership Secretary; Show Secretary; Assistant Show Secretary; Newsletter Secretary; Conservation Officer; three 'Ordinary Members'.

The Committee's candidates will be listed on the Agenda at the meeting, together with any nominations sent to me (with consent of the nominee) by April 26th (see rule 16). N.B. we still need candidates for Vice Chairman, Show Secretary, and one Ordinary Member. Any other items for inclusion in the Agenda, or proposals for changes to the Rules, should be sent by the above date; this is particularly relevant to any members who will be unable to attend but wish to have their views known.

#### PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

9.00 am Arrival; Show and Sales tables; coffee or tea available from around 9.30. Brief committee meeting at 9.30.

10.00 am 5th Annual General Meeting.

12.00 am approx. A talk by Dr Richard Bateman - Resolving plant paternity suits: DNA studies reveal the evolutionary relationships of European Orchids. (If you thought you Knew all about orchid classification, this will make you think again ... or worry you stiff!)

1.00 pm Lunch

2.00 pm An illustrated report on the HOS expedition to Cyprus in March.

2.30 pm Native Orchid Culture - a talk by Dr Tom Norman....to be followed by a cultural forum with a panel of HOS 'experts' to answer your every question, some of them politely!

4.00 pm Tea or Coffee

5.00 pm Close

The cost of lunch will be the same as last November: £10.00 a head, to include tea and coffee. If you wish to come but prefer to make other arrangements for lunch, tea or coffee can be bought over the counter for 60p per cup; but I would appreciate knowing if you are coming. Those who wish to reserve lunch, coffee and tea, please send the form at the back of the newsletter, together with a cheque for £10.00 per person (payable to The Hardy Orchid Society) to Richard Manuel, 45 Thorncliffe Road, Oxford, OX2 7BA, by May 3rd 1997.

Richard Manuel

#### The Spring Show

Diana and Tony Hughes

Calling all Growers!

The Committee is keen that this year's Show should be the best ever, so, how are your plants coming on? We realize that the Show Schedule, incorporated in the Society's Rules, is a bit detailed, but don't be put off by that - if you have a nice

plant in flower why not let us all see it? To make things easy, we will be prepared to accept entries up to 10.00 am on the day of the Show. However, if you could warn the Acting Show Secretaries (Diana and Tony Hughes, 8 Birchwood Road, Malvern, Worcs., WR14 1LD, Tel: 01886 832647 or by e-mail : hughes@atc.dra.hmg.gb), that would make their job much easier. all entries must be staged by 10.30 am, when the room will be cleared for judging.

To make the day more interesting, we would also like to encourage members to bring along items of interest to include in a non-competitive, exhibition area. If you have anything orchid-related that might interest other members, please bring it along before 10.00 am. Suitable things might include plants which are not quite at the showing stage, photographs or paintings, the laminar flow cabinet you made for 99p or other useful bits of equipment, seedlings at various stages of growth, not-quite-hardy orchids and so on. The exhibition will only be as good as the imaginations of the members, so get thinking! The only thing we ask is that, if your contribution will need more than a few inches of bench space, please warn the Show Secretaries beforehand.

#### HARDY ORCHID SOCIETY FIELDTRIP, 8th June 1997

Norman Heywood has very kindly organised this trip for society members. The day will be lead by Martin Jenkinson, Blair Sibun and Norman Heywood. The following is a proposed itinerary;

To reduce the number of cars travelling in convoy it would be easiest to meet at Norman's i.e. Hardy Orchids Ltd. New Gate Farm, Scotchey Lane, Stour Provost, Gillingham, Dorset. Grid Ref: 816224. We shall leave New Gate Farm at 9am so please do not be late! Alternatively if you do not have time to get to New Gate Farm, meet at Hardington Moor National Nature Reserve, Grid Ref; 516132 at 10.30 am. The reserve is just south of the village of West Coker, which lies on the A30 to the West of Yeovil. This is a site with large populations of Orchis morio and Orchis mascula, and in a good year is a fantastic sight.

We shall leave here and travel in convoy to a nearby reservoir at Sutton Bingham, where if we are lucky we shall be able to watch osprey fishing. Obviously we are not sure of an osprey sighting but they were there last year. There are plenty of other water birds including grebes and a large heron colony.

If there is sufficient time we may sidetrack slightly to visit Batcombe, to see the Twayblades and Fly orchids.

Then North-East, to the home of Blair and Jackie Sibun, near the village of Leigh, just south of Sherbourne, Grid Ref: 633077 where we can relax and eat our packed lunches. They will

provide tea, coffee and squash. We can also enjoy their interesting garden and greenhouse, for those interested in cool growing orchids and vireya rhododendrons.

From there onwards to a private site near Sturminster Newton, which we have been given permission to visit. this is a managed water meadow and you will need waterproof boots or wellies. The society has visited this site previously but on this occasion we shall have more time to identify the various orchids and other flora.

Following this if you have any time left to spare you are invited back to Hardy Orchids Ltd, which is very close to the route back to the A30 and A303.

The cost for the day will be £2.00 per person, all going to society funds. Please book early as numbers are limited to 26. Please send name, address and telephone number plus your cheque (payable to the Hardy Orchid Society) to Mr. Norman Heywood at the address above, there is a tear off slip at the back of the newsletter. In return you will receive maps and further details.

#### A NOTICE ABOUT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Richard Nicol, Membership Secretary  
1364 Evesham Road, Astwood Bank, Redditch, Worcs.B96 6BD

I would draw attention to rule number 4 in the society rule book.

"Subscriptions to be determined at a general meeting and payable from 1st July each year. Any member whose subscription remains unpaid at 31st December shall cease to be a member of the society"

The current rates of membership are £6 for single membership and £9 for family membership.

#### DACTYLORHIZA REPORT UPDATE

Darren Sleep

I've been asked for an update on the article which appeared in the 1994 edition of the National Pleione Report. To those unfamiliar with this, it describes my removal of a number of Ophrys & Dactylorhiza plants from a factory site about to be cleared for redevelopment.

The vast majority of plants were sent to Norman Heywood for distribution to parties within the HOS and RBG Kew, I have not heard anything further on these plants and would like to hear from any of the recipients. When I visited Norman the following year, I was pleased to see some seedlings (from seed collected at the same time) happily growing away in flasks.

A further visit to the site during demolition yielded more Dactylorhiza plants which I still have. The 5 Bee Orchid tubers

I kept had increased to 12 last year & I passed some on to other growers. In my experience these plants have adapted very well to cultivation and increase quite well.

Almost all of the Dactylorhiza have now flowered for me, my initial identification of a mixed population of fuchsii and purpurella still stands. There are some apparent hybrids, one of which is very beautiful. The fuchsii are a varied bunch, there is one form which has unmarked 'calamine lotion pink' flowers and is only 4 inches in height, there is a white form about the same size. The plant with the most promising future in cultivation is one with very nicely marked leaves, grows about 18" and has 'typical' fuchsii flowers. This plant is very vigorous and increases like mad, I even donated some individuals to the sales table at this years AGS Morecambe show. One plant puzzles me, it has not flowered but I'm convinced it isn't a Dactylorhiza, it has a tuber which looks more like a collection of individual tapering finger-like tubers. These are slightly wrinkled. Its leaves appear with the Dactylorhiza but are still green in November, long after the Dact's have died back, and have a fleshier appearance. The most likely candidate was Gymnadenia but I have now dismissed this and am considering the Butterfly Orchids. I'll just have to hope for flowers!

Alan Dash has asked me to say a few things about 'collecting'. Firstly -I strongly believe that no wild plant should be collected unless there is no possibility of its survival in-situ.

\* The site which I collected from was a derelict chemical plant, I used to work there as a chemist and was familiar with the hazards, I had a good working relationship with the manager who was left behind to decommission the plant. for these reasons no one would have been allowed to carry out this operation. Received wisdom states that the local wildlife trust should be consulted in a case of this kind, I was specifically asked to keep the operation confidential, which brings me to my first point; the word to remember is TACT, anyone in the process of selling a site for redevelopment is not likely to be pleased if the local wildlife trust is making noises about rare plants on the site! The result will be that no-one, including yourself, will be allowed access and the plants may well be bulldozed as a matter of priority! Please ask the land-owner before involving others.

\* The plants that I collected were on private property and collecting is o.k. with the owners permission - get this in writing before putting spade to earth!

\* Collect only from parts of the site in immediate danger.

\* Don't collect more than you have facilities to deal with, It's all very well saying that you will give the surplus to your wildlife trust for re-planting in a safe site but remember that some plants will not survive being moved to another site. (Ophrys, I suspect, do much better if moved into cultivation). Perhaps the HOS conservation committee could look into establishing a system for advising on placement of rescued material?

\* If you distribute plants to other people, send a copy of your letter of permission with the plants. (I would suggest that anyone offered such plants should ask for a copy.) I don't accept that it is reasonable to sell collected plants.

On a more practical note;

\* Try to work at the right time of year if possible, I was lucky in that I collected in August. Ophrys will be completely dormant but will soon be starting into growth, this is the best time to move them - the biggest headache is finding the plants, ones which have flowered would still have old flower spikes visible and this is a big help. Dactylorhiza are probably less fussy about the time of year but August seems to suit them fine, many will be going dormant or well on their way to producing next years tubers and should establish well.

\* Record habitat details carefully, it could provide life-saving clues if plants are found to be struggling in their new homes. Take photographs, note grid references, if you have a simple soil testing kit (pH etc.) use it. Publishing a short note in, for example, the HOS newsletter may be a good idea.

\* Dig with the utmost care, there could be few things more heartbreaking than finding half an orchid tuber on your spade, this means using your fingers if necessary - hence the bleeding hands referred to in my original article. You would not believe how far the extremities of a Dactylorhiza tuber can reach in stony soil - and they are sometimes more knotted than the worst carrot ever seen on 'That's Life'.

The last thing I want this article to do is to encourage people to go around digging up orchids - it should be as a last resort.

Editors note: I have contacted Norman Heywood with respect to the current whereabouts of the plants referred to in Darrens report, and he informed me that they were distributed to HOS members and also to Sandra Bell at Kew, at one of the early meetings of the HOS conservation committee (which took place at Kew ). So if any members can give us an update or progress report on plants from this source it would be interesting and useful. Seed collected from the same source and passed to Norman was sown and the subsequent seedlings sold.

#### FLASKING FORUM

Weaning from culture without fungus.

Richard Manuel

Those native orchids for which we do not (yet!) have a compatible fungus must be grown asymbiotically - mostly Ophrys and some Orchis species, Himantoglossum, Barlia and others - and although these grow very well in flask, they have proved extremely problematic to wean. I have personally killed

hundreds of seedlings in experimenting with various methods, but I now feel I am beginning to understand a little of what is needed. I have had some successes! It is a sad fact that unlike their tropical counterparts, which adapt fairly readily to the weaning method described in the last article, our native orchids, when grown asymbiotically, do not.

Several problems occur in asymbiotic culture which do not really figure in the symbiotic method. Much longer periods are necessary in flask, and usually reflasking a couple of times (thinning out) is necessary for best growth. Each handling operation increases the risk of contamination, which usually means death to the seedlings as there is no way of killing the infection without murdering the seedlings too. The only hope is to spot an infection at its earliest stages and then reflask all those seedlings which are well clear of the infection; with larger seedlings one can try weaning them there and then, but with a reduced chance of success and loss of "quality growth time" (see next paragraph).

Experience has shown that most species require two growing seasons in sterile culture to produce big enough tubers to wean successfully. First year tubers can be weaned successfully, though the failure rate is much higher, and even so, as they generally start out so much smaller (\* see below) they will take at least one year longer in overall time to reach flowering size than tubers weaned after two years in flask. This is simply because growth is so much better in flask. First-year weaned tubers, if they survive, after one years growth in a pot will hardly show any increase in size over the season - the tubers they produce at the end of it will certainly be a lot smaller than tubers of the same age grown in flask. (My definition of a worthwhile size tuber for weaning is at least two centimetres long, preferably three or more.)

\* Naturally, there are often one or two seedlings that race ahead of the others and may produce good sized, weanable tubers in the first year.

Various methods of weaning asymbiotic seedlings have been recommended by different authors:

1. Planting seedlings only a few weeks old, as soon as they produce roots and leaves, into compost. This has never worked for me.
2. Planting out larger seedlings at the stage where they are just starting to make their first tuber. Although this works well with symbiotic seedlings I cannot make it work reliably with asymbiotic ones, the main problem being that after transfer the roots die off fairly quickly followed progressively by the rest of the plant.
3. Deflasking plants which have formed their tiny first year tubers and keeping them wet until they start regrowth. This method is claimed by its German inventor to be infallible, but for me it leads to the inevitable rotting of a huge majority of the seedlings, even if constantly drenched with a fungicide. Several variations of this method have been put forward, mainly

revolving around different compost formulas and always necessitating heavy doses of fungicides - not a desirable method of working.

4. Current experiments along the lines of introducing a fungus to sterile compost, giving it time to spread through the pot, and then introducing seedlings, are showing promise. But so far the success rate is low and only a few species have responded positively. This may be the best way forward but it will need time to develop. This can work with fungi which are not capable of germinating the species in question, but can infect it at a later growth stage and form a mycorrhizal association.

The following method seems to give a much greater chance of success, but I must stress that too little data is available at the moment to be certain of anything. In a couple of years time I might be in a position to recommend a method as reliable - or not! I will try to explain my thinking as I go along. I have used mostly a range of Ophrys species, with a few Mediterranean Orchis and related genera for these experiments; I suspect that more northerly species such as Orchis purpurea and Orchis mascula may need a different regime as they usually do not have a long dry dormancy.

The main idea is this: the methods described above all involve seedlings in growth: my idea is to take dormant tubers and let the new growth - when it appears - emerge into the real world, not flask or propagator, thus eliminating any trauma caused by changing their environment from flask to pot whilst they are actually in growth. The plants are grown in vitro for two years, that is two growing seasons. At the end of the first year a small tuber forms and goes dormant in the flask. Once all the green bits have gone brown and the plants have entered their first dormancy the flasks can be put away in a dark cool place with no artificial heat to upset them.

Around late August or early September at least some of these tubers should be showing signs of starting into growth. If not, put the flask in the fridge for a couple of weeks, then bring out into the light. I believe that in nature the new growth is triggered by the onset of the cool or cold night temperatures that start to occur in autumn. There may be other factors too, but I believe this is the main one. Any other sort of "environmental jolt" might prove successful in starting them into growth - anything is worth a try! But don't expect every single tuber to burst into growth; at any resting stage there will always be a percentage that refuse to wake up again.

Once growth starts reflash them into fresh, very soft medium (eg Greenaway with only 5.5 g. of normal agar per litre - too soft to allow you to invert the flask without disaster!) containing charcoal, and which is as deep as you can afford - about an inch is a fair compromise. This allows even seedlings with quite long roots, to be reflash with ease. They slide quite easily down the side of the jar in the liquid layer that forms there. This position also allows easy viewing of development. Don't overcrowd them, about ten seedlings in a



honey jar is enough. Once the leaves start to grow give them good light but don't cook them in direct sun. These second growth seedlings will grow like mad and provided you have got the timing right, will start to produce a large tuber early in the following spring, or even late winter. These big tubers can be allowed to go dormant in the flask, but do keep an eye on them as a flask kept for nine months or so always seems to be increasingly prone to infection (I suspect that the seal weakens and mites find a way in).

Dormancy in these tubers can be recognised by some or all of the following signs: the pointed tip of the tuber ceases growth and rounds off; the point where it joins the tuber root (which should be noticeably longer than the tuber) becomes sharply defined, often with a demarkating "ring"; the root hairs often disappear; a brownish "skin" often forms over the tuber - (a healthy colour like a potato skin, not a brown haze in the medium around it which is caused by nasty excretory products and is a signal to deflask NOW); and of course the green bits die off. There is a critical point in the development of these tubers when they become "sealed off", for want of a better phrase, and become resistant to desiccation. A difficult thing to describe but fairly easy to recognise. Such tubers are very firm and usually well rounded; again rather potato like. Sometimes tubers are formed that are very elongated, with only a very short connecting root, and usually fairly soft - these always seem to rot if you try to deflask them. This last seems a common characteristic of Ophrys apifera, our native Bee orchid, which seems less easy to deal with than many of its mediterranean cousins.

Another method I have recently tried is removing the plants from the flask a little earlier, around the stage where the leaves are just starting to yellow and wither, and the tuber is almost fully formed - when it has stopped growing at its tip. These plants have been potted up and well watered in, perhaps with a little weak fertiliser, and left in a coolish place to dry out slowly. I think it is also likely that good strong second year plants that are really galloping ahead in full growth will also wean, using the same method described for symbiotic plants. Both methods are being tried out at the moment and so far things are going well, but there must be an increased risk of getting some infection before the tuber goes fully dormant and the soil has dried out. Sterilising the compost before planting might help, but it also may pave the way for an infective organism to spread without competition. Some plants will die, or the tubers will wither away!

Once the tubers are fully dormant they can be deflasked, given a wash in a mild fungicide if you wish - physan seems to work well - and potted loosely in DRY loose compost. Don't tear off the dried remains of the old root stem - it contains the rudiments of the new growth bud which might be damaged. This potting is only temporary as will be revealed, so a good number can be put in the same pot. Pots should be kept in a COOL, SHADED, AIRY place, and NEVER watered. It is a misconception to think that mediterranean orchids need a "summer baking". Their

tubers aestivate several inches below the surface where the soil is cool even when bone dry. Leave them lying in the sun and, just like you and me, they will shrivel - try it if you don't believe me! Ideally a shaded place outside but under cover on, say, the north side of a building is the best sort of storage situation.

From the time they go dormant in the early summer until new growth starts, tip out the dormant tubers every week or two to make sure they are not growing mould, which can happen even in a dry pot, treat with fungicide only if necessary. You must resist any temptation to water dormant tubers. These tubers exist as a drought resisting stage in orchids which live in places where the summers are virtually bone dry for several months (the occasional mediterranean summer storm water runs off the surface and rarely penetrates the baked soil surface). The tubers have no means of taking up water because they do not expect to get it and they are not equipped to do so, so why give them any? Further, if the compost is watered you are creating just those moist conditions which suit many unsympathetic fungi and nasty microorganisms which may thrive and attack your precious tubers, so why take the chance?

Once the night temperatures begin to drop significantly (October / November) you can expect to see the beginnings of new shoots appear. But note, many seedlings are often quite late in starting growth compared with adult plants in the same conditions. The regular weekly or fortnightly check will reveal this new growth. Now you can pot them permanently. Assuming you have a number of tubers, it is a good idea to sort them into pots at a similar stage of growth, planting them with the tips of their shoots about an inch below the surface. Remember that the roots grow from the base of the new shoot and if not sufficiently deep in the soil they will dry out, with dire consequences. Once the shoots appear at the surface there should be the beginnings of a few roots (no harm in tipping them out again to check this) and if so a gentle watering, NOT A SOAKING, is in order. I use a hand spray and give just enough for the compost to dry again during the day, repeating this every morning when the weather is fine and bright should encourage the roots to extend. Once the leaves start to open, proper watering can begin and the compost wetted right through - and you have a weaned plant in growth! After that its entirely up to your own growing skills. Try to keep the plants green for as long as possible into the summer by providing cool, moist and shaded conditions in the hope of getting the biggest possible tuber. If you do it really well some of these little plants are quite capable of flowering at the end of their first growing season outside the flask.

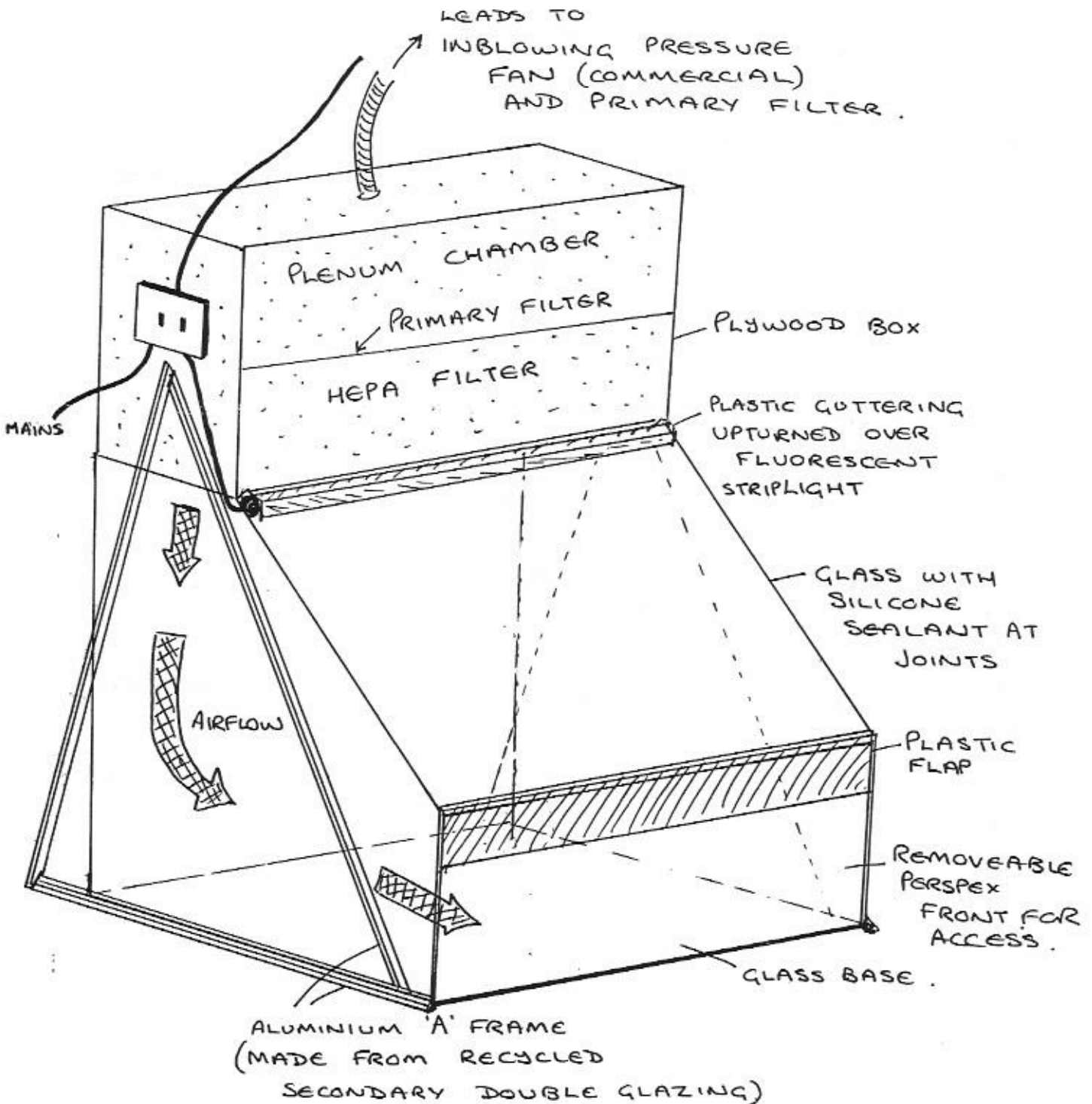
#### A DIY LAMINAR FLOW CABINET

Carol Dash

The following is a diagram of a laminar flow cabinet made by Peter Fairhurst for his wife Kath. The basic design can be very

variable and depends upon the size and type of HEPA filter which can be obtained. Indeed obtaining such a filter is probably the hardest part of the task - ex-hospital/surgical sources may be worth exploring. Members suggestions are very welcome on this point. Peter's filter was provided by a friend in America.

The interior of the cabinet can be sprayed or wiped with iso propylalcohol to assist with producing a sterile environment.



0 cms. 20

APPROX SCALE.

## GROWER'S DIARY - PART 4

Alan Dash

### April

The succession of mediterranean type orchids continues in the greenhouse (now shaded) but pales into insignificance compared with the real thing in Crete which we were fortunate enough to visit during April (1996). The limestone hills to the North of Spili in SW Crete are to be recommended as a place to visit for anyone the slightest bit interested in mediterranean orchids and bulbs.

Back to the greenhouse - the rather old thermostatically controlled fan heater breaks down just before the holidays - typical! The weather is still cold and so I am forced to leave a heater on a time switch so that it is on every night we are away. (This year an understanding wife bought me a new thermostatically controlled heater and the old one was mended so that I now have a spare).

The cost of the holiday in terms of 2 weeks away is not too dramatic. Some of the *Cypripedium* seedlings appear to have dried out too much. The *Cyp. guttatum* seedlings look sick but they have been growing for over 5 weeks which hopefully will have been sufficient for them to have grown next years shoot (they have an incredibly short growing season in some of their natural habitats). More of a problem which I seem to get every year is a massive explosion of aphids on the plants in the greenhouse. These damage the leaves causing spotting and streaking and the honeydew and aphid carcasses cause mouldy areas on the leaves. I am always wary of the use of chemicals on these orchids and spend ages picking them off by hand and forceps. PLEASE can somebody write an article on safe pest control with these orchids.

By the end of April many of the mediterranean types have flowered and are brought in from the greenhouse into our converted attic room for their summer dry rest period to begin. The plants are not watered again and their compost gradually dries out.

### May

All the mediterranean orchids are now transferred to the attic to dry off. Seed pods are still developing and can be harvested soon. Some seed pods are taken for "green podding", others develop and dehisce - seed is tapped from the pod into paper packets and stored in a dry, cool place before sending on to Adrian Blundell for the seed bank.

*Epipactis* and *Dactylorhizas* grow away in the garden and in pot culture. The *Dactylorhiza foliosa* in the raised bed outside the kitchen window and the *Epipactis palustris* in the rockery both survived the cold winter and appear to be fairly slug resistant.

The *Cypripedium* seedlings *C. reginae* and *C. californicum* continue to grow steadily in the shaded greenhouse and are kept moist at all times.

June

Dactylorhizas and Epipactis dutifully flower as well as the Disas bought at the AGM. All these are pollinated to produce both hybrid and species seed (carefully labelling the crosses).

A "local" meeting of around ten interested HOS members is arranged at the house of Kath and Peter Fairhurst. This proves very interesting with much useful discussion and exchange of ideas. Thankyou Kath and Peter from all who were there.

I hope the various jottings have been of some interest. There have been a mixture of successes and failures during the year. Each year seems to see an expansion of numbers of plants forcing more and more alpines and bulbs from the greenhouse out into the coldframes. During 1996-97 there will be /have been different methods and different challenges including weaning of seedlings.

Editors note: This is the last in the current series of Growers diary. It would be very interesting to share someone elses growing experiences in future newsletters. If anyone would like to write either a regular cultural feature or simply a one off, it would be most welcome - please let me know.

## ORCHID HUNTING ON RHODES

Tony and Diana Hughes

At 8 a.m. on 4th of April 1990, we stood shivering at Birmingham Airport while our plane was being sprayed with de-icing fluid. A few hours later we were shedding garments in the warmth of Rhodes, intent on spending the next two weeks enjoying a feast of Mediterranean spring flowers, with the emphasis on orchids. We were not disappointed! Our 'homework' had included reading previous AGS articles (Vol. 53 page 19 and Vol 54 page 18), which provided welcome information on the flowers to be found, but not a great deal about locations. For that we had to rely on information provided privately by various friends, and in particular by John and Win Hooper of Staines (referred to here as 'J&WH') who had visited Rhodes in April 1987. Having arrived in Rhodes, we also gleaned useful information from the many flower-hunters we encountered, lenses agape, leaning precariously over tantilising specimens. On many occasions we realised how fortunate we were to have so much guidance, so thought that others might appreciate a sort of 'Cook's Tour' of a selection of Rhodian orchid sites.

We make no claim to be exhaustive; on an island so rich in botanical treasures it is difficult to stop one's car anywhere without being within 20 meters of an orchid! All we can offer is a selection of habitats, spread over the island and close to roads, that cover a fair proportion of the orchid species to be found. Within two weeks one can visit only a limited number of places; doubtless there are other places to equal or better

those that we explored. Furthermore, our exploration of these sites is unlikely to be complete. Not only had various species finished flowering before we arrived, but we also know that a few other species should have been found that weren't. And who knows what changes have taken place in the six years since our visit?



Our 'Bible' for identification was *The Orchids of Britain and Europe* by P. and J. Davies and A. Huxley, but we soon found that other people used other books with different classification schemes and names. The problem becomes embarrassingly acute when an Englishman with one book and a little German attempts to discuss an oddity with a different book and no English! (In updating this article we have attempted to use the nomenclature favoured by Deforge, but are not confident about all the identifications!)

Now, at last, to the flowers and their haunts. In order to avoid endless repetition of long names, the Table contains a summary of our finds at six of our most prolific hunting grounds. In the Table the asterisks, \*, represent our own observations whilst the plus signs, +, represent additional finds by J&WH in April 1987. The locations of the six sites are described fully in the text and are shown on the sketch map.

The English spelling of most names is not standardised - often adjacent road signs would offer three alternatives, all different from those on our maps! The solid lines on the sketch map represent reasonable quality roads, while the dotted lines represent more-or-less driveable tracks. Most of these are made of rolled stones, but the quality and the sizes of their pot-holes depend on the ravages of the previous winter. Some appeared more like river beds.

SPECIES	LOCATION						COMMENTS
	A	B	C	D	E	F	
<i>Aceras anthropophorum</i>						*	
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	*			*	*	*	Widespread
<i>Barlia robertiana</i>			*		+	*	Sporadic; over
<i>Limodorum abortivum</i>	*		*	*		*	Widespread
<i>Neotinea maculata</i>						*	Prolific
<i>Ophrys bombyliflora</i>			*				Prolific
<i>Ophrys rhodia</i>	*	*	*	*		*	Widespread
<i>Ophrys ferrum-equinum</i>			*				
<i>Ophrys fusca</i> (agg.)	*		*	*	*	*	Widespread
<i>Ophrys iricolor</i>				*			
<i>Ophrys attaviria</i>	*				*	*	
<i>Ophrys episcopalis</i>	*	*				*	
<i>Ophrys candica</i>					*	*	
<i>Ophrys lutea</i> (agg.)	*	*	*	*	*	*	Widespread
<i>Ophrys reinholdii</i>	*			*	*	*	Widespread
<i>Ophrys scolopax</i> (agg.)	*	*	*	*		*	Widespread; confusing!
<i>Ophrys regis-ferdinandii</i>	*			*			Nearly over
<i>Ophrys mammosa</i>	*			*			Widespread
<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>	*					+	Early
<i>Orchis anatolica</i>		*					Frequent on hills
<i>Orchis fragrans</i>	*						Around coast, late
<i>Orchis italica</i>		*					Sporadic
<i>Orchis lactea</i>						*	2 spikes only
<i>Orchis laxiflora</i>			*				Prolific
<i>Orchis morio</i>						*	
<i>Orchis papilionacea</i>	*	*	*	*	*		
<i>Orchis papilionacea</i> x <i>morio</i>						*	1 spike only
<i>Orchis provincialis</i>						*	Prolific
<i>Orchis sancta</i>	*	*		*			Late flowering
<i>Serapias bergonii</i>		*	*	*			Widespread
<i>Serapias parviflora</i>				+			Also at Kalamonas
<i>Serapias orientalis</i>							Around Lahania

Table 1: List of orchid species found at six selected sites. See text for details of locations.

Our hotel was on the north-east coast, about 6km out of Rhodes city, near Koskinou. Not surprisingly our first hunting ground ('A') was within walking distance of the hotel. Travelling south from Rhodes city towards the decaying Italian town of Thermae Callithea, the main east coast road reaches a peak in the region of Cape Vodi. On either side of the road for about half a kilometer north of the crest we found a wide range of orchids close to both sides of the road. The land here slopes generally to the north-east, has some small pine plantations, but is mainly covered in 'phrygana', the mixture of low growing, spiny shrubs common over much of the island. This was the only place we found Ophrys tenthedinifera, and even at the start of our stay they were on their very last flowers; elsewhere they were well over. This also proved to be an excellent area for O. episcopalis, the form of Late Spider Orchid for which Rhodes and Crete are renowned. By the end of our stay these were in full bloom, and specimens with up to eight magnificent flowers were found. This area also provided our first encounter with Ophrys rhodia, though at the time we called it O. carmeli, not being aware that the upright top sepal was very significant! Just a kilometer to the south above the car park at Thermae Callithea, there is a sparsely vegetated area. By 15th April this was covered by a good show of Orchis sancta, intermingled with the occasional spike of Orchis fragrans.

Site B is near Kolibia, some 25 km south of Rhodes on the east coast. From here a good road goes westward towards Arhipolis, Eleousa and Mount Profitis Elias (of which more later!). For the moment it is only necessary to travel some 400m. west of the road junction and then explore the thin strip of cypress woodland that skirts the rocky hillside on the south side of the road. Although this is a very small area, it yielded numerous species, including some impressive spikes of Orchis italica. The orchid plants did extend up the scrubby hillside above the wood but, thanks to the greed of the goats, we found better specimens in the wood. J&WH were fortunate to find here a pure white form of O. papilionacea.

If you can tear yourself away from the orchids, it may prove worthwhile to cross the road for a moment's bird watching in the nearly dry bed of the Loutani river. Here we were entertained by the nervous feeding of four Glossy Ibis, while a Little Egret flew by and a pair of Long-legged Buzzards put on an aerobatics display above. About 2 km west of here is the turning to Epta Piges (Seven Springs) which is well worth a visit. On the wooded banks of the streams here we encountered several orchid species, but the real delight was the vast number of huge spikes of Limadon abortivum.

Site C is about 25km further south and a little further inland on the road from Lardos to Laerma. On going westward from Lardos we entered a scene of devastation; in 1987 a massive fire had devastated vast areas of coniferous woodland in the centre and south-east of the island. The blackened trunks



remained in the rocky landscape, stark reminders of that terrifying event. At the time of our visit a carpet of greenery was reasserting itself, so we explored a little and were relieved to find a few Serapias and Ophrys surviving. When 7km west of Lardos, however, we passed beyond the worst of the devastation into a small area of damp grassland, pinewood and cultivated fields. Here the ground on either side of the road was carpeted with a purple haze of hundreds of spikes of Orchis laxiflora. After the customary 'emergency stop' on sighting orchids, the rest of the day was spent in blissful exploration. Sadly we did not spot the pure white form of O. laxiflora that J&WH had found, but were impressed by the quantity of Ophrys bombyliflora around; this was the only place we came across it. The O. scolopax group was also here in profusion, and caused us no end of difficulties - still largely unresolved! The range of variation went from the magnificent large-flowered O. heldreichii, through long-horned O. cornuta types to small, short-horned O. bremifera types, with all stages in between. We also encountered Dr Dieter Wenker of Dortmund here, who was helping to co-ordinate the AHO survey of the orchids of Rhodes. He confirmed our suspicions that the seemingly continuous range of characteristics of the scolopax group found on Rhodes makes it almost impossible to distinguish the species with any accuracy.

Meeting Dr Wenker was a stroke of extremely good fortune, since he was pleased to share with us much of his AHO information. We gleaned a small sub-set of his data and set off next day with renewed enthusiasm and expectations.

We had previously explored a hillside in the extreme southwest of the island, just north of Kattavia on the track (it doesn't merit the 'title' road, even by Greek standards!) up to Messanagros. However, the dry winter and very early spring had transformed a noted orchid area into an orchid wilderness. On that occasion we had retreated to the beach just west of Kattavia and found Orchis fragrans in full bloom. A subsequent diversion to Plimmiri Beach, just a few km east, revealed the first spikes of O. sancta also blooming well, mixed with more O. fragrans. It was interesting to note that, whereas the Holy Orchids were always the same shade of pink, the Bug Orchids varied from deep crimson to pale creamy-pink, but always with dark spots on the labellum. (J&WH had found at this location a fine specimen with pure white flowers and only a few red spots.) These diversions were further rewarded when a Montague's Harrier and a pair of Rollers entertained us with a close-up flying display. Dr Wenker's suggestion, however was to explore the upper end of the Kattavia-Messanagros track; this proved to be an excellent suggestion.

Site D, therefore, lies about 1km south of Messanagros, in the vicinity of the turn-off to Moni Skiadi (wrongly drawn on some maps!). Here on the northerly slopes at an altitude of about 300m., the winter conditions had proved much more

amenable to the orchids. The hillside were covered in phrygana, and it was in the more open area where the bushes were shorter that the orchids thrived. We had optimistically hoped to find Ophrys cretica, recently discovered here and at a couple of other sites in this south-west corner but, either we had the wrong location or the goats had found them first. There was no way that we could convince ourselves that any of the spikes of Ophrys reinholdii were really O. cretica in disguise. We were far from disappointed, though, because we found some fine specimens of O. iricolor, as well as many other species, all growing very strongly.

Site E is further up the west coast, on the western slopes of Mount Attaviros about 1.5 km. out of Embonas (Hebonas) on the road to Monolithos. Travelling south from Embonas, it is necessary to locate the last stone track on the east side of the road before the pinewoods come right down to the roadside. Walk up the track between fields of vines and olives until, after about 300 m., the track ends between some derelict stone buildings. Continue through the gate in front of you into a small field, then turn left up the slope, through the gap in the fence and into the woods. Continue upwards for a short distance and then scramble up the rocks to the apex of the little ridge, and there are the orchids. At the time we thought this was the best site for Ophrys omegaifera, but we have since learned that our friend Dieter Wenker and his colleagues have now separated a new species, O. attaviria, named after the mountain we were exploring. Had we been more familiar with O. omegaifera, we might have got in first!.

At this site we also found some fine specimens of what we took to be Ophrys candica, our identification being based largely on the small size of the upper petals and of the speculum. However, our main reason for exploring this site was the reported discovery here of Cephalanthera epipactoides, a white-flowered Helleborine found mainly in Turkey. Our instructions said it was to be found 20m. from the patch of Spider Orchids. It wasn't! Either we were unable to measure 20m., or we started from the wrong patch of orchids. We hope others will be more fortunate.

Finally we come to site F. Mount Profitis Elias, the botanical gem that no visitor to Rhodes should ignore. The best approach is from the west, where a turning off the Salakos to Embonas road meanders steeply up towards the summit area, mainly on the northerly side of the ridge. The mountain is extensively but sparsely wooded with pines and cypresses, beneath which flourish endemic paeonies (Paeonia rhodia) and cyclamen (Cyclamen rhodia syn. C. repandum var. rhodense), both in full flower for us, and of course orchids. It is well worth exploring any part of the upper reaches of this road, but we waited until we saw large yellow patches of Orchis provincialis alongside the purple of O. anatolica and O. morio ssp. picta. The good quality tarmac road terminates at a pair of hotels, the 'Stag' and the 'Doe', built during the Italian occupation

earlier this century. From here good cobbled paths lead the energetic up to the summit ridge. We were slightly disappointed as the quantity of orchids reduced the further we got from the road. Our consolation came within a few yards of the ridge top where a solitary spike of Orchis lactea greeted us in a patch of sunshine, in close proximity to some late flowering spikes of Neotinea maculata.

Beyond the hotels the road continues east down to Eleousa, some 8km. away but only as a rough track. The orchids continue though, so this route must be recommended for those with good ground clearance and soft suspension - we refer to their car of course! Back at the highest point of the road, just opposite the place where a 'no entry' track branches off towards the military establishment on the summit, we found another good patch of Ophrys candica.

Pyramidal orchids, Anacamptis pyramidalis, were common throughout the island. Around the east coast the predominant colours were the range of pink shades common in this country. On Mount Profitis Elias, however, white was the predominant colour, with occasional very pale pink specimens. Another curiosity found on the mountain was the hybrid between Orchis morio and O. papilionacea, with most floral characteristics mid-way between its two parents. Although we did not see any O. papilionacea nearby, we were assured by others that it is frequently found there.

The problem with Mount Profitis Elias is that one visit is not enough - we made three. However, we almost wish we had not made the third visit, because those areas that had previously been carpets of yellow and purple were now bare. Close inspection revealed rosettes of nibbled leaves with half-inch flower stalks - that scourge of Greece, the goat, had done its worst.

So far we have said little about Serapias. This is not because we didn't find many (on the contrary, they were almost everywhere) but more because of our inability to identify them precisely. We intoned 'Serapias vomeracea laxiflora' over most specimens (now we mutter S. bergonii), but recognised that a wide range of characteristics were embraced under this umbrella. Only once, just above Kalamonas on the road to Petaloudes, the Valley of the Butterflies, did we pronounce 'S. parviflora' with any confidence. Serapias orientalis, however, was quite a different matter. Around Lahania, in the south-east, and particularly on the low ground beside the road from there to Mesanagros, we found numerous, richly-coloured specimens (which initially we thought were S. cordigera, but we are older and wiser now!)

We should also say a few words about some of the commoner orchids we did not find. All the examples of the Ophrys lutea group that we came across were of the small-flowered form with the comparatively narrow yellow border to the lip. At the time

we called them ssp murbeckii, but now we cannot be sure whether O. phryanae or O. sicula is appropriate. However, we saw no sign of the true O. lutea, which is reported to be present on Rhodes - unless its earlier flowering was responsible for some of the dead spikes scattered around? Another early flowerer we failed to find was Ophrys speculum. We felt fortunate to find a few specimen of its narrow-leaved relative, O. regis-ferdinandii, but these were well past their best, having only their topmost flowers remaining. Barlia robertiana was readily identified, if only by the huge seed spikes dotted around in many places, but only one spike was found in full flower, not surprisingly on a shady northern slope. We didn't find any members of the Ophrys argolica group, although others told they had been in flower earlier. We believe we came close to Orchis pinetorum which had been reported from the pine woods on Mount Attaviros, but had no time to search for it. Finally, neither we nor J&WH found Orchis quadripunctata, although the timing was right and there are reports of its presence in quantity on Mount Profitis Elias.

We have to admit to at least two errors. Firstly, everyone we met informed us that we had chosen the wrong year to visit Rhodes! The very dry winter and spring had had a significant effect on both quantity and quality of flowers in general and of the orchids in particular. We feel a touch of envy for those who follow us and are treated to even better displays than we enjoyed so much. Secondly, we chose the wrong hotel. Admittedly, it was an excellent hotel and looked after us extremely well, but it was so placed that we wasted a great deal of time and petrol driving south in the mornings and north in the evenings. Next time, and we sincerely hope there will be a next time, we shall try to make our base further south, preferably about halfway down the east coast.

In conclusion, we hope that this note will help a few members to get more quickly to some decent locations on Rhodes - but don't rely just on these notes. Many other members of the society have been there too, on different dates and in other years, and will have found many sites and species that we didn't. There is a lot more information available, if only you are cheeky enough to ask!

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Gote Svanholm, one of our Swedish members;

I had the good fortune to visit Japan in April 1996. To my pleasant surprise we hit the Cherry blossom at its peak. However I also tried to look out for any hardy orchids.

Traditional Japanese gardens have very few flowering plants so the number of orchids is obviously very limited. In Kyoto in Sai Ho Ji (also called Koke Dera = moss temple), I found a flowering plant of Cymbidium goeringii. In the Hase Dera temple

in Kamakura I found another, plus many flowering Cypripedium japonicum. There were also some Calanthes but they were not advanced enough to guess about the species.

Although the cherries were fantastic, it was rather early to visit the botanical water garden of Hakone. This garden is very well worth a visit. Erythronium japonicum were in flower and the first Lysichiton camtschaticum were unfolding their spathes. The garden also sells a number of plants, many very interesting. I noted that Eleorchis japonica and two varieties of Pogonia japonica were on sale.

In Himeji I passed a little shop selling seeds, bulbs and plants. They had at least 3 different varieties of Orchis graminifolia on sale. They were not given fancy names, just descriptions of the type e.g. "white with red feathering". These were sold as small dry tubers in envelopes of the type normally used for seeds. They also sold Habenaria radiata already planted in sphagnum in little pots. It was interesting to note that the cultural leaflet recommended spraying with benlate at least twice in the summer.

On the whole, I get the impression that Japanese suppliers of plants sell small numbers of flowering plants but they have very choice plants available. I assume that this is an adaptation to the very small plots and the non-flowering garden tradition.

.....

Would anybody be interested in joining an Informal Art Group?

After discovering our shared interest in art at the last Hardy Orchid Society meeting, Sarah Marks and Sylvia Temple would like to invite other interested people to make contact and consider forming an Art Group within the H.O.S.

The main purpose of the group would be relaxed company in which to draw and paint on HOS day trips - any subject that inspires you on the day! Any art media can be used and any level of ability welcome, as Sarah is a new-comer to art through evening classes, interested in drawing and watercolours and Sylvia having taught art and interested in acrylics.

So, if you would like to join us in our appreciation of these beautiful sites, please make contact, or bring your equipment on one of the field trips!

Sarah Marks,  
83 Ladysmith,  
East Gomeldon,  
Salisbury,  
Wilts, SP4 6LE  
Tel; 01980 610151

.....

In Newsletter No. 2, I wrote a note on the Bee Orchid tuber, that I over-watered. the current situation (early February) is that the tuber shrank considerably during storage in the greenhouse, and that the roots and a very strong shoot have

appeared from the BASE of the tuber. It appears that the growing tip was damaged/rotted by the over-watering so it started growing from the base, this has made it late to appear above ground though!! The question now is will it survive or will the rot get going again?

Bill Temple,  
Primrose Cottage,  
Hanney Road,  
Steventon,  
Oxfordshire.  
OX13 6AP

.....

#### Reg Parkers Field

I work for the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Grange in Cumbria. In June of 1996, I received a phone call at work from a former (retired) ITE colleague, Dr Peter Howard. Peter was very excited about his re-discovery of a site recorded by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust some years ago and apparently forgotten. Peter is well travelled and when he said that there were more orchids in a small area than he had seen anywhere outside the Alps I had to see for myself. He collected me from work that same lunchtime and told me that in spite of him working at ITE for 30 years he had never looked into this field, which is all of 200 meters away! The field is next to the road and has very thin soil over partially exposed limestone, the field slopes steeply and is no good for agriculture or building, the owner realizes what he has got and maintains the field very responsibly, it is lightly grazed in the summer and otherwise gets no attention. The result is a wild flower paradise, typical limestone plants abound, cushions of Thyme on the exposed rocks and mats of yellow Potentilla.

The Orchids; this summer it was difficult to walk without treading on one! The most abundant were fuchsii/maculata type Dactylorhiza in extraordinary variation - how anyone can attempt to identify a Dact' from one plant defeats me. These were closely followed by Gymnadenia conopsea, these too showed more variation than expected, we didn't find any whites but there were some plants which were a curious sort of pink/brown colour. There were a number of plant of the Lesser Butterfly Orchid, I had never seen these in the wild before and was particularly taken with them. (I must try to obtain a cultivated plant for the collection - can anyone help?). Also visible were numerous Orchis mascula although these had finished flowering, definitely worth a walk up there next spring.

Peter has drawn the attention of the wildlife trust to this field once more and stressed our view that this is an important site.

Darren Sleep,  
28 Foxfield Road,  
North Scale,  
Walney Island  
Barrow-in-Furness  
Cumbria LA14 3SJ

.....

I was very interested to read the first part of the Flasking Forum written by Richard Manuel and felt motivated to comment on two aspects. The first is a tip which kitchen sink propagators like myself will find is a valuable short cut in the preparation of media. Dissolving the agar into the nutrient solution is a delight using a microwave oven. Put your 1 litre of medium into a large 2 litre microwaveable plastic jug and microwave on high for 8 minutes, the agar dissolves perfectly every time. Give a short stir and decant into jars which go into the pressure cooker for 20 minutes for sterilisation. Be sure to use a jug which has twice the capacity of the volume of liquid otherwise the medium will froth over the sides and cause quite a mess inside the microwave resulting in possible withdrawal of kitchen privileges.

The second comment I would like to make is a plea for a standard approach when expressing bleach strengths and dilutions in these columns. Anyone attempting to communicate how they sterilise and scarify orchid seed should first read the paper by Fred Bergman in Orchid Review Vol 103 No 1204 (July/August 1995). Bergman was faced with the problem of why his new batch of bleach did not germinate seeds when the old batch had been very successful. Upon investigation he found that the strength of available chlorine in some modern calcium hypochlorite powders was much stronger and that his old bleaching powder after 7 years only contained 18% available chlorine (AC) when it was originally labelled as having 70%. Also that earlier recommendations of bleaching times and strengths made by Wilson in 1915 and by Knudson in 1922 were made with the much weaker bleaching powders then available, and also of an unknown age. Bergman's final recommendation is that bleaching strengths should only be expressed as % AC, the calculation to be used is rather confusing to someone like myself who barely scraped through O level maths many years ago. So I would suggest that if we name the actual product used and describe how many ml. of liquid bleach (or grams of bleaching powder) are added to a stated volume of water, then everyone will know beyond doubt how to prepare the solution in question. For example, to bleach *Dactylorhizas* I use Milton which I believe has 2 % AC when fresh and dilute this at the rate of 10 ml. of bleach solution added to 55 ml. of water. I think this gives me a 0.3% AC but wouldn't argue if someone says I'm

wrong. Anyway, 25 minutes in this solution gives me the required effect.

Beyond doubt? - well not quite if your source of bleach has been on the garage shelf for the last 7 years.

Peter Corkhill  
4 Hall Close  
Austwick  
via Lancaster LA2 4BX

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## The Membership List

We have included in this mailing a list of current members of HOS, for your information and interest.

One of the unfortunate facts of a nationwide society like ours is that, inevitably, many members live far away from any central meeting place, and consequently few of these can get to meetings. An alternative way to meet other members is to form local groups. These do not have to be large, or formal in any sense. Inviting someone round for a cup of tea and a chat about your plants or other orchidaceous interests is an obvious way to start and, if reciprocated, a group has been started to which others can be added. Further, two or three members in the same area might then decide that travelling together would make the occasional trip to a full meeting worthwhile, even if the distance is great.

Thus members in more remote parts may be pleasantly surprised to find that there is a fellow member living not too far away - if so, why not drop them a line?....It's up to you now.

RLM

NB: If you are aware of any mistakes on the list please contact Mr R. Nicol, membership secretary.

If you have recently joined the Society and are not on the list don't panic (too much!) as we hope to publish an update in subsequent newsletters.