

**Journal
of the
HARDY ORCHID SOCIETY**



Vol. 18 No. 5 (103) Christmas 2021



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Front Cover Photograph

Cypripedium Dietrich photographed by Michael Weinert and featured in an overview of the *Cypripedium* AGM Trial at Wisley by Clare Hermans and Phillip Cribb (see the article on page 152).

The Hardy Orchid Society

Our aim is to promote interest in the study of Native European Orchids and those from similar temperate climates throughout the world. We cover such varied aspects as field study, cultivation and propagation, photography, taxonomy and systematics, and practical conservation. We welcome articles relating to any of these subjects, which will be considered for publication by the editorial committee. Please send your submissions to the Editor, and please structure your text according to the “Advice to Authors” (see Members’ Handbook, website www.hardyorchidsociety.org.uk, or contact the Editor). Views expressed in journal articles are those of their author(s) and may not reflect those of HOS.

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Editorial Note

Mike Gasson

With a healthy supply of articles submitted by HOS members we decided to publish this extra *JHOS* in 2021. It has allowed us to get some of the submitted articles into print a little earlier than would otherwise have been the case. Also, it allowed us to find space for a couple of larger articles that can sometimes prove tricky to accommodate.

I hope you enjoy the extra issue which we expect to distribute shortly before Christmas – hence its festive name. We have tried to provide interest for our growers in the form of an overview of Cypripedium cultivars by Clare Hermans and Phillip Cribb. European orchids are well represented in an article from Gordon James that we requested following on from his earlier presentation at one of our live meetings. Both provide some excellent photographs of their subject orchids. These larger articles are rounded off with a couple of shorter pieces featuring our UK orchid flora with memories of our last native Lady’s-slipper Orchid and an unusual Autumn Lady’s-tresses from the New Forest. Interest in *Epipogium roseum* is continued with a historical report of the species in Malawi from Isobyl la Croix.

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Chairman's Note
Carol Armstrong

Hope you enjoy this bonus edition of our Journal. With the dark nights and short days upon us in UK & Europe, then what could be more cheering than reading about orchids from the warmth of home? (and of course also when it is too hot to step outside in Australia and New Zealand).

Wishing all our members a Happy Christmas, Nadolig Llawen, Nollaig Chridheil, Nollaig Shona, Joyeux Noël, Fijne kerst, Frohe Weihnachten, Happy Holidays, Häid jõule, Glædelig jul, Veselé Vánoce, Buon Natale, Feliz Natal, Feliz Navidad, God Jul, Wesołych Świąt, Καλά Χριστούγεννα.

More about *Epipogium roseum*
Isobyl la Croix

Reading John Grimshaw's account of finding *Epipogium roseum* in Tanzania reminded me of when I saw it in Malawi about 40 years ago. At that time, all the tea estates in the Southern Region kept a patch of indigenous evergreen forest to preserve their water sources. These were favourite places for orchid-hunting and bird-watching. They were usually surrounded by a tangle of scratching and stinging creepers, but one could always find a track through at some point and, once inside, the forest floor was almost clear.



Epipogium roseum in Malawi
Photo by Nigel Johnston-
Stewart

A friend who was both a keen ornithologist and interested in orchids dropped in one day to show me an orchid that he had not seen before. He had found it growing in leaf litter in deep shade in one of those forests. There were two flowering stems, so he photographed them and took one for a herbarium specimen. It was obviously what we called at that time saprophytic, with a pale brownish-pink stem and dingy pale lilac, drooping flower with a few red spots. It was unfamiliar to me too, so my husband Eric and I arranged to go with him the next day to see it. However, at the

site less than 24 hours later, all that was left were withering flowers with developing seed capsules. We returned to the area a few times in the following days, hoping that more specimens might appear, but with no luck. We also kept an eye on the original plant, which developed from flowering to shedding seed in less than a week.

The herbarium specimen went eventually to Kew, where it was identified as *Epipogium roseum*. It was the second record for Malawi, and was subsequently cited in Flora Zambesiaca. The other specimen had been found in a similar forest patch in another nearby tea estate.

Epipogium roseum has a very wide distribution, but how does it spread? Plants probably self-pollinate and lots of seed seems to be produced, but there is little wind to spread it in these dense forests. Even in more open woodland, seedling epiphytic orchids tend to cluster on branches near the parent plant. The discontinuous distribution in subsaharan Africa can be explained by the fact that forest was much more widespread in the past, but how did the species colonise areas from Africa to Asia and Australia?

All the British and Irish Orchids

Ian Phillips



Lady's-slipper Orchid
Photo by Ian Phillips

Paul Redshaw's paper on the Lady's-slipper Orchid brought back memories of seeing it in the 1960's. But it was not the first orchid that I saw. Unusually, that found me on a grassy verge in an industrial valley near Rochdale in Lancashire, where I was preparing for a physics exam. Do I need to say that it was an Early-purple Orchid, though I needed friends to identify it.

My second orchid was indeed the 'Lady'. I was walking in the woods at Grassington and decided to follow a track leading down to the road. I came to the inevitable stone wall, guarded by Jacob's Ladder in profusion. I climbed over, went on my way, and met a man guarding what he explained was a rare plant, not however in flower. A year later a medical student friend in London, knowing of my botanical interests, told me that his father had been invited to go to see a rare

orchid and would I like to join him? Yes please! On arrival I was introduced to George Jarman who explained that we were to see the Lady's-slipper Orchid and swore me to secrecy. We were led up the very path that I had come down the previous year, and I bagged my second orchid.

Soon after that wonderful experience I started to make trips to the South Downs having attended a course given by Mr J. E. L. Lousley organised at the South London Botanical Institute, a privilege that I did not fully realise at the time. The last session with him took us to the Downs, where he showed us a hybrid orchid. I don't remember which. A fellow student was a young man who became a world expert on our alien flora. As I saw – intentionally – more and more of our orchids I realised that I wanted to see them all. I achieved that with the help of our president and through him, of Lynne Farrell, who introduced me to a young lady who was keeping watch over *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* on a Hebridean island, a grand finale. A certain young botanist tells us that he recently saw all the British orchids in one season, and has written a thoroughly entertaining account of it. May I also claim a potential record of having achieved that same in a period of seventy years? Alas, just having “celebrated” my 85th birthday, I am unlikely to see the latest Tongue Orchids – both of which I know well in the Province of Malaga, where I saw all the recognised species over a period of some 35 years.



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Cypripedium AGM Trial **Clare Hermans and Phillip Cribb**

Less than 25 years ago it would have been inconceivable to give any hardy slipper orchid the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) but times have changed thanks to a small but talented group of propagators and hybridisers. *Cypripedium*s, especially hybrids, turn out to be easy to grow and, in suitable conditions in the garden, clumps can double in size each year.

Until the 1980s very few *Cypripedium* species were available in European nurseries and then only occasionally: notably the Eurasian *C. calceolus*, *C. macranthos*, *C. × ventricosum* and the North American *C. reginae* and *C. parviflorum* (with subsp. *parviflorum* and *pubescens*). The last is very much like our own *C. calceolus* but much more variable in habit and flower size and colouration. However, the genus *Cypripedium* comprises some 50 species with a centre of diversity in China and a smaller one in North America. As China opened up, species scarcely seen outside of that country began to appear in nurseries. A few gifted plant breeders, especially Werner Frosch in Germany, Peter Corkhill in England and Camiel de Jong, working for Anthura in the Netherlands, realised that they provided a potential source of parents for a programme of hybridisation that might lead to hardier and more easily grown plants. Some of the newly introduced species have been particularly successful as parents, particularly the North American *C. kentuckiense* and the Chinese, *C. flavum*, *C. fasciolatum* and *C. segawae*.

As a consequence of their increasing popularity it was decided they would be suitable for an RHS trial. It was the first orchid trial, a collaboration between the Orchid and Joint Rock Garden Plant Committees, and ran from 2018 to 2020. The main objective was to assess which hardy slipper orchids were suitable for the rock garden or border. The assessment panel of nine met at the Wisley Trial ground up to five times a year. The plants were grown in the exposed site within a locked and alarmed net cage to deter theft and provide additional shading. The judging criteria were hardiness, growth, earliness to flower, longevity of individual blooms and length of flowering season. There were a total of fifty-nine different entries with three plants of each, obtained from multiple sources. Some plants already had an AGM; most, however, did not. The successful candidates were recommended for an AGM and then ratified by both plant committees.

Fig. 1: The *Cypripedium* trial at the RHS Wisley Trial ground.
Figs. 2 & 3: *Cypripedium* Boots in the trial, RHS Wisley.

Photos by Johan Hermans



The original ten *Cypripedium* AGMs were increased to thirteen as a result. They all have an RHS Hardiness rating of H5 (-5 to -10°C. Hardy in most places throughout the UK even in severe winters. May not withstand open/exposed sites or central/northern locations).

New AGMs

There were four new AGMs, all of which formed good clumps.

Cypripedium Boots, whose parents were *C. calceolus* and *C. montanum*, was registered by Heinz Pinkepank, Germany in 2005. It was floriferous with up to three flowers per spike (Figs. 2 & 3).

Cypripedium Ivory, a cross between *C. cordigerum* and *C. kentuckiense*, was registered by Gartenorchideen-Koch, Germany in 2008. It was later flowering and had two to three flowers per spike (Figs. 5 & 15).

Cypripedium* × *ventricosum, a natural hybrid of *C. calceolus* and *C. macranthos* found from Russia to Korea, was first described by Olof Swartz in 1800. It has been in cultivation for over 250 years and comes in a range of colours from ivory white, to yellow through to deep purple and combinations in-between (Fig. 17).

Cypripedium Victoria, a cross between *C. parviflorum* var. *pubescens* and *C. fasciolatum*, was registered by Peter Corkhill in 2005 (Fig. 16).

Pre-Existing AGMs in the Trial

Eight pre-existing AGMs were included in the Trial. The following seven performed well.

Cypripedium Gabriela, a cross between *C. fasciolatum* and *C. kentuckiense*, was registered by Werner Frosch in 2003. Gabriela is also known in the trade as ‘Kentucky Maxi’ (Fig. 4).

Cypripedium Hank Small, a cross between *C. parviflorum* and *C. henryi*, was registered by Carson Whitlow, USA in 1991. It is compact and floriferous with brightly coloured flowers that are slightly larger than those of *Cypripedium Boots* (Fig. 13).

Cypripedium Michael, a cross between *C. macranthos* and *C. henryi* was registered by Werner Frosch, Germany in 1998 (Fig. 6).

Fig. 4: *Cypripedium Gabriela* in the trial, RHS Wisley.

Fig. 5: A container grown *Cypripedium Ivory*.

Fig. 6: *Cypripedium Michael*.

Photos by Johan Hermans (Fig. 4), Phillip Cribb (Figs. 5 & 6)



Cypripedium Philipp, a cross between *C. macranthos* and *C. kentuckiense*, was registered by Werner Frosch in 1996. It is also known in the trade as ‘Kentucky Pink’ and ‘Macra’. The striking flowers are well held on their tall stems above the foliage (Fig. 8).

Cypripedium reginae, a species from central and east Canada to north-central and east United States of America, where it grows in wet ground forming large colonies between sea level and 500m, was first described by Thomas Walter in 1788 and is known as the Queen Lady’s Slipper Orchid. In the trial it was later flowering and formed large clumps with two or three flowers per spike (Fig. 9).

Cypripedium Sabine, a cross between *C. fasciolatum* and *C. macranthos*, was registered by Werner Frosch in 2002. It has larger flowers than the similar *C. Michael* (Fig. 10).



Fig. 7: *Cypripedium Ulla Silkens*

Photo by David Ridgeway

Cypripedium Ulla Silkens is a cross between *C. flavum* and *C. reginae* originated by Johnny Petersen, Denmark and registered by Svante Malmgren, Sweden in 1996 who named it for his wife. It was very similar in habit and shape to *C. reginae* and was late flowering and occasionally had two flowers per spike (Fig. 7).

Finally the eighth existing AGM in the trial was ***Cypripedium kentuckiense***. Unfortunately it did not perform well and it was decided to rescind the AGM for this species.

Fig. 8: *Cypripedium Philipp*

Fig. 9: White form of *Cypripedium reginae*

Fig. 10: A container grown *Cypripedium Sabine*

Fig. 11: *Cypripedium Ulla Silkens* and *Cypripedium reginae* growing together in a garden in Switzerland

Photos by Johan Hermans (Fig. 8), David Haselgrove (Fig. 10) & Phillip Cribb (Figs. 9 & 11)

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The Other Pre-existing AGMs Not in the Trial

Two other pre-existing AGMs were not included in the trial. The panel decided based on their collective expertise, to recommend their AGMs be retained.

Cypripedium Dietrich, a cross between *C. calceolus* and *C. kentuckiense* was registered by Werner Frosch in 2003 (Fig. 12 & front cover).



Fig. 12: *Cypripedium* Dietrich in Michael Weinert's garden, upper Bavaria, Germany
Photo by Michael Weinert

Cypripedium formosanum, a species from central Taiwan, where it grows in montane forest in open damp situations between 2,300 and 3,000m elevation, was first described by Bunzô Hayata in 1916. It has two very attractive pleated fan-shaped leaves; its white-striped pink pouch has a characteristic shape which differs from all the other AGM *Cypripediums* (Fig. 14).

Cypripedium Culture in the Garden

Cypripedium hybrids are more tolerant garden plants than is generally appreciated. Unlike many of the species, which can be difficult subjects, the hybrids can grow in a range of soils, providing care is taken on placing them.

Most hybrids prefer a mineral-rich compost and are rather intolerant of direct sunshine for more than an hour or two a day but will thrive in light shade, under a tree

Fig. 13: *Cypripedium* Hank Small in the trial, RHS Wisley.

Fig. 14: *Cypripedium formosanum*.

Photos by Johan Hermans (Fig. 13) & Phillip Cribb (Fig. 14)

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or shrub or by a fence or wall. They are remarkably accepting of low temperatures. In the wild they are often covered with snow. However, they are less tolerant of wet cold which can kill a plant if it suffers such conditions for more than a day or two. This is easily remedied in a garden setting by placing a tile or cover over a plant in such weather.

Aspect is a critical feature that is often overlooked. Even in the wild, it is rare to find plants growing on a south-facing bank where they receive sun from morning to night. Most grow on the north-facing slopes of valleys and mountains. In the southern half of England this is particularly critical, but the further north you garden, the less likely they are to worry about this. In truth, some of the finest cultivation we have seen is in the north of England and Scotland while, in Europe, they flourish in Alpine gardens.

Anthura, the company which produces *Cypripedium* plants in bulk for the nursery trade, recommends planting their hybrids in garden soil. This soil is often mineral-rich and, in many cases, this works well, although we would recommend improving the soil drainage with expanded clay granules and/or grit to keep it well-drained



Fig.15: *Cypripedium* Ivory in the trial, RHS Wisley
Fig. 16: *Cypripedium* Victoria in the trial, RHS Wisley.
Fig. 17: *Cypripedium* × *ventricosum*.

Photos by Andrew McSeveney (Fig. 15), David Haselgrove (Fig. 16) & Phillip Cribb (Fig. 17)

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and prevent waterlogging. They do not like having organic material mixed into the compost but macerated oak or beech leaves, for example, can be spread around the crown once it is planted. Once established they will thrive in substrates as diverse as clay, loam and sandy soils. *Cypripedium reginae* and *C. Ulla* Silkens tolerate moister compost and grow well in one with organic material in it.

Once plants come into growth, they should be watered regularly in dry weather, preferably with rain-water but they tolerate tap water when the former is unavailable, to prevent them desiccating, an increasing likelihood with climate change. Otherwise, they benefit from the occasional application of a commercial fertiliser

Given the success of the *Cypripedium* trial it is hoped other orchid genera will be chosen as subjects some time. For a longer version of this article see *The Orchid Review* June 2021 p.13.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jim McGregor chairman of the panel, Andrew McSeveney RHS Trials, Michael Weinert, David Haselgrove and Barry Tattersall for their assistance with this article.



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Some Orchids of Southern France: A Baker's Dozen and a Few of Their Friends

Gordon James

I was fortunate to be invited to give a presentation at the Autumn meeting in Kidlington, entitled 'Plateau of the Orchids'. I felt able to do this, not because I was a particular expert on orchids but because we have a house in the region and we know the flora of the area extremely well, having spent some of each of the last 25 years there, including one whole year immediately following my retirement from teaching; spending much of that time walking just about every track and path available. The plateau in the title is the Plateau de Guilhaumard, which forms the southern most promontory of the great limestone upland of the Causse Du Larzac in Languedoc and our house is in the tiny hamlet of Le Clapier, a short walking distance south of the plateau. The village is situated in the southern extremity of the department of Aveyron, where the flora of the area is extremely rich and includes in excess of fifty species of orchids, not to mention a myriad of hybrids. Naturally, the talk strayed off piste at times, but rarely very far. The entire area is situated on largely calcareous rocks of the lower Jurassic era with an altitude of between 500 and 850 m. While summers can be hot and dry and the winters can be cold with periods of snow, the annual rainfall is around 1000mm.

I thought it might be interesting to write something about the plants for the Journal, but how to tackle the selection and what to include about each? Having recently read the article in the journal about South African orchids, I enjoyed the detailed descriptions of each of the species; but since many, if not all of the orchids I will be dealing with, will be familiar to most of the readers, this would be superfluous. So, I have settled on thirteen of our favourites; some common and some rarities, a few native to the UK, but many not, and will try to explain what it is about each that we love.

I will start with an early flowering *Ophrys*. *Ophrys lutea* is just one of around ten species of *Ophrys* which often abound in the short, stony limestone grasslands. I have chosen it for its wonderfully cheerful yellow flowers which appear early in the year. It is far from common on our plateau, being at the upper end of its altitude range, though it can be found scattered here and there during late April but is far more common twenty kilometres or so lower down on the edge of the great 'Languedoc wine-lake', where it flowers several weeks earlier. One site in particular is a disused limestone quarry beside a small road close to Neffiès, where hundreds of the lovely Yellow *Ophrys* can be found associated with *Ophrys scolopax* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Its distribution in France is distinctly southerly and restricted to sites below 700 m in altitude. The French atlas also comments that it is a species which is expanding to the north of its range, so who knows it may reach the UK one day!



Fig. 1: *Ophrys lutea*
All Photos by Gordon James

Of all the other *Ophrys* species, *Ophrys aveyronensis* has to be chosen as one of our ‘Baker’s Dozen’ not only for its grandeur of flower but also because it is endemic to our very limited region. It has been recorded from 11 ten-kilometre squares in Aveyron and two in the neighbouring department of Hérault to the south. This beauty has a very broad, almost round labellum and the three sepals are purple each with a green streak at its centre, not unlike *Ophrys apifera*; however, unlike *apifera*, the petals are larger and darkly coloured. It couldn’t be said that *Op. aveyronensis* is common, but can be found quite readily, especially on the eastern side of the plateau, mixing with other *Ophrys* species in the short, stony grasslands. *Op. aveyronensis* has previously been classified as a sub-species of *Ophrys sphegodes*, which from the shape of the labellum, is no surprise. However, *Op. aveyronensis* has distinctly pink to red sepals and petals and flowers in our area in late May to June, a good four to six weeks later than *Op. sphegodes*. Like any *Ophrys*, when allowed to associate with other species, hybrids are very common and many of the plants that you will find are difficult, if not impossible, to associate with an actual species.



Fig. 2: *Ophrys aveyronensis*

Fig. 3: *Ophrys insectifera*



The other *Ophrys* that I must include in my list is *Ophrys insectifera*, it's so wonderfully like its name and, of course, it is also a British native. It is also Europe's most northern species of *Ophrys*, extending its range up to central Sweden, and unlike some of its cousins it is less fussy about where it grows, tolerating a degree of acidity in the soil and habitats ranging from the dry to the wet. Delforge describes it as being widespread, but rather rare; and certainly, in our area, though quite abundant it is rarely found in

any large numbers. On Guilhaumard it tends to congregate on the northern fringes of the plateau, in open areas which are sheltered by surrounding shrubs and trees. It is widely distributed in France with the exception of the higher ground of the Massif Central and the western fringes. In Britain it has a scattered distribution, mainly towards the south and the east of England.

Two of our selected favourites are amongst the 'background' orchids that can be found widely distributed and often in large numbers across our region. One of these, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, is also fairly common in Britain, whilst the other, *Orchis simia*, is one of Britain's rarities. *A. pyramidalis* first starts to appear in and around the village during the middle of May, and then through the rest of May and June



Fig. 4: *Anacamptis pyramidalis*

it can be seen everywhere, except for wet habitats and deep shade. Apart from the joy of its numbers we love it for its pink-red inflorescences, with clear, unmarked flowers. It is widely distributed throughout France, though rare or absent above about 1000 metres and sparse in the western parts of the country, where the soils are too acidic. In Britain it occurs in almost every 10km square in the south and east of England, and then it is restricted to the coastal fringes of Wales, western Scotland and north eastern England.

The other ‘background’ species that we have chosen is *Orchis simia*, which starts to appear in late April and dominate certain areas throughout May and into June. Apart from its numbers, it had to be one of the chosen because of the sheer joy of its flowers which look like small dancing monkeys. Numbers can vary widely from year to year, but in all the springs that we have visited the area we have never had any trouble finding *O. simia*, virtually wherever we went. Its distribution in France is widespread, but patchy, but noted in the atlas as being particularly common on the limestones of the grand-Causse. Our region is one of the bastions of the Monkey Orchid. It can be found up to 1500m but is far more common below 1000m. In Britain it is restricted to two sites in Kent and in Oxfordshire at one site according to the BSBI online atlas, or two according to Stace. Other *Orchis* species which join *O. simia* to cover the calcareous limestones of the plateau at various periods of the season are *Orchis mascula* (Early-purple Orchid), followed by *Orchis purpurea* (Lady Orchid), *Orchis militaris* (Military Orchid) and *Orchis anthropophora* (Man Orchid). Being orchids, they readily hybridise, producing a huge range of baffling intermediates.



Fig. 5: *Orchis simia*

Dactylorhiza, often referred to as Marsh-orchids, are well represented in our area, more commonly in the occasional damper habitats. However, our first choice, *Dactylorhiza sambucina* (Elder-flowered Orchid) tends to grow on the more open, dryer habitats. It is by no means common in our area, and we have only seen it in two places, and here only in quite small numbers. As a species it is widely distributed, from the Crimea to central Spain and Sicily in the south to central Scandinavia, though often rare in its stations. It is more of a montane species in France, being most abundant between 750 and 1550m. and restricted to the uplands of the Alps, Pyrenees and Massif Central. Both yellow and red forms are present in our area, though we have only seen the yellow. The first place that we found *D. sambucina* was just off a road growing amongst short, stony limestone grasslands. Our other site, where the plants were much more common, was on slightly acidic basalt, where a volcanic sill forms a ridge about 10 km south of the village, which is otherwise occupied by Lerab Ling, the largest Buddhist Temple in Europe.

The other *Dactylorhiza* that made it onto our list is *Dactylorhiza elata*, which is wonderfully robust with the flowers being subtended by long bracts and it is indeed a true Marsh-orchid. In our area at least it is restricted to damp ditches and flushes, where water runs off the overlying clays onto the limestone. The plants can be particularly robust, occasionally exceeding 1m in height, as is the case in one particularly fine stand beside the road from Le Clapier to Fondemonte, where water runs off the Triassic red marls into a ditch along the roadside. The flowers tend to be darker and more marked than either *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* or *Dactylorhiza*

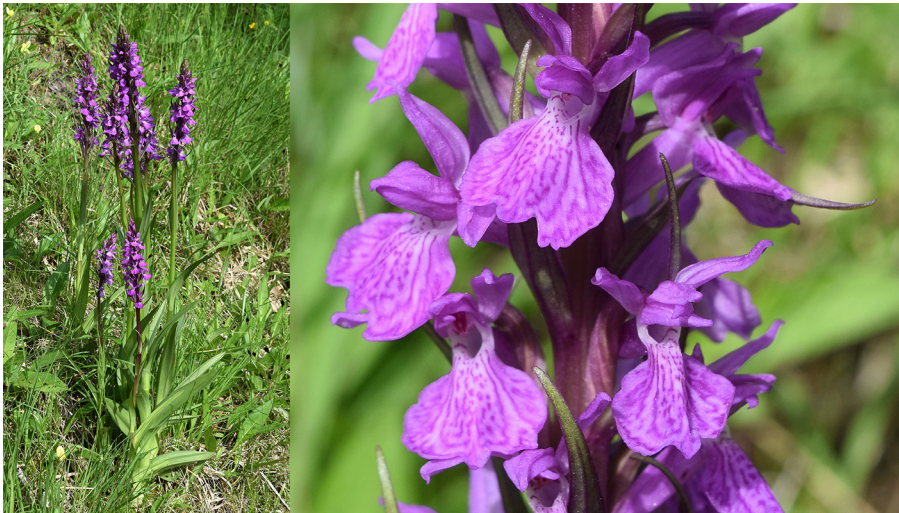


Fig. 6: *Dactylorhiza elata*

maculata, which can also occur in similar habitats, but the clinching feature is the long, pointed bracts which are noticeably longer than the flowers. The species has a western Mediterranean distribution, widespread and abundant in some stations. In France its distribution is fairly sparse and almost entirely west of the Massif Central but with a noticeable cluster in southern Aveyron and northern Heurault. Like many of the French species of orchid that grow in damp or wet habitats, it is classified by the UICN (L'Union Internationale Pour la Conservation de la Nature) as being "Vulnerable".

While some of our choices grow in such numbers that they cover the ground and can be found almost anywhere that you go, our next three have very limited distribution and need to be searched for. The first of these is *Serapias vomeracea*, one of two Tongue orchids that grow in our region. The heartland of the genus *Serapias* in France is certainly coastal Provence, where seven species can be found. *Serapias lingua* and *S. vomeracea* are the only two species that could be described as widespread, and *S. vomeracea* only occurs in one 10km square in Aveyron. Fortunately for us this



Fig. 7: *Serapias vomeracea*

site is situated a few kilometres down the road from our village, on a steep, rocky meadow opposite the hamlet of St Xist, and even here we could only find one small clump of the orchids, after an extensive search that lasted for several hours, quite late in May. However, during the search we came across a wide range of other orchids, including many *S. lingua*. *S. vomeracea* is clearly distinguished from *S. lingua* by its robustness and the length of bracts and hood, with the bracts being particularly long. According to the French atlas *S. vomeracea* is expanding its geographical range and certainly, on our site near St Xist, it grows on much drier soils than the more common *S. lingua*.

The next local ‘rarity’ is *Ancamptis papilionacea*, the Pink Butterfly Orchid (which is still named *Orchis papilionacea* in my 2006 edition of Delforge). This has been chosen partly for its local rarity, but mainly for its beauty. Its one locality in Aveyron is a site overlooking the River Tarn, which is home to a huge range of plants, including many orchids. There are only a handful of sites for this species in southern



Fig. 8: *Ancamptis papilionacea*

France, while worldwide the species is more abundant to the east and spreads as far as the Caspian Sea. Our site is situated on a rocky, limestone hill behind the tiny village of Linas and overlooks the River Tarn, just a little upstream from the famous Millau Viaduct which carries the A75 over the Tarn Gorge. We visited the site during late May and having found a place to park the car, we walked up into the village with the instructions to ascend the hill behind, but totally unable to find any path. Obviously looking puzzled, a woman leant out of her window and inquired, “Les orchidée?”, “Oui”, we replied in our best French, and she indicated a tiny path that wound up behind the houses. We walked around the hill and over its top until, on its far side, we saw a whole hillside of pink orchids growing amongst poor, herb-rich grass. *A. papilionacea* might not be widespread but here at least it is abundant. The shape of the labellum is quite variable, ranging from narrow to ones broader than they are long. Delforge describes a var. *grandiflora*, that is found to the west of the species range, which could easily describe many of the plants on this hillside. Others are distinctly green veined on the hood, and are certainly hybrids with *Anacamptis morio*, which is also very common here.



Fig. 9: Hybrid between *Anacamptis papilionacea* & *Anacamptis morio*

Our third rarity is *Cypripedium calceolus* the Lady's-slipper Orchid, or more romantically in French, 'Les Sabot-de-Vénus'. This had to be included, especially as we had never seen it in the wild before and of course it is very lovely. The species is widespread but rare in boreal and temperate Europe and in montane regions further south, however it has a very broad distribution in Europe and across Asia to the Pacific coast. In France it is largely restricted to the foothills of the Jura and Alps with three sites in Aveyron and Lozère (the adjacent department to the east), all situated close to the gorges of the River Tarn. Two German friends, who also have a holiday home in the village and a wide knowledge of the local flora, provided us with instructions and a map so we could find the *Cypripedium*. Unfortunately, the scale was not clearly indicated on the map and we again spent the best part of the day searching before discovering the treasure; all well worthwhile. The starting point of this expedition was a small viewing point, serving snacks and coffee, called 'Roc Des Hourtous', offering for the princely sum of one euro, a wonderful view over the Tarn Gorge and the tiny canoeists paddling, or quite often wading, down the centre of the river below. The orchids themselves grow on either side of a very steep path which descends a gully on the north facing slope of the gorge. This was the only time in France that we saw a sign signifying the importance of the site and pointing out the fine which might be incurred if one should damage any plants. It was also the only time we actually had to manoeuvre around people photographing the orchids, all-be-it just four people. The orchids were very healthy looking and growing in very large numbers. It goes without saying that during the day's search we came across many other species of orchid as well as other plants.



Fig. 10: *Cypripedium calceolus*

The Violet Limodore, *Limodorum abortivum*, has been chosen from two possible saprophytic or parasitic species which grow on our plateau and the *Limodorum* won out over the Bird's-nest Orchid on colour! It is found from Iran in the east to the Atlantic in the west and spreads north to the Belgium border, however it is more abundant in the south of its range. Delforge describes its preferred habitat as 'mid-shade on cool calcareous substrates' and in our experience, it is most commonly found on the edges of roads and tracks. Although usually described as saprophytic, the roots of some plants have been seen connected to the roots of *Cistus*, indicating that it could at times be parasitic. Along with some of the Helleborines, cleistogamy is common and in *Limodorum*, flowering and fruiting entirely underground has been recorded. It can be found scattered around the village and plateau in small groups, and in our region at least generally opens its violet coloured flowers in May. Its leaves are restricted to pale-violet bracts, clinging to the stem. In France its distribution is centred in the East and South and is far more scattered elsewhere.



Fig. 11: *Limodorum abortivum*

One species that we couldn't possibly leave out is *Himantoglossum hircinum*, the Lizard Orchid, which starts to send up its flowering shoots from the middle of May and flowers through all of June, slowly unfolding its wonderfully coiled 'tongues' that form the long, central section of the labellum. Around the plateau and village, it is common, and during June you are likely to come across small groups of it whenever you are out for a walk, though never in very large numbers in any particular place.



Fig. 12: *Himantoglossum hircinum*

It is one of the most stately orchids that we have. Although Delforge describes it as being ‘rather rare and local’, across France it is widely distributed, wherever suitably calcareous habitats exist. The only other species of *Himantoglossum* that we have on the Plateau is *Himantoglossum robertianum*, Giant Orchid, which has moved genus from *Barlia*, through *Orchis* to *Himantoglossum*. In its heartland in Provence it can be very robust and grow to over 1m, but around us, at the top of its altitudinal limit, it is far smaller and quite rare.



Fig. 13: *Epipactis palustris*

Later in the season, the plateau and surrounding area are dotted with groups of various Helleborines, both *Epipactis* and *Cephalanthera*. These would form a conclusion to our orchid season, except that much later, in October, the tiny *Spiranthes spiralis* make a belated appearance. Most of the Helleborines prefer the shadier areas of the plateau, and especially the steep beech-hangers that cascade down its steep north facing edge. The one that I have chosen here though is an exception. *Epipactis palustris* is a plant of wet calcareous flushes, pond edges and dune slacks. It doesn't grow on the plateau, which is far too dry, but a large colony can be found in a marshy area about 10 to 12 kilometres to the west of us, somewhere off the road towards St Affrique. I have chosen this example simply for the beauty of the flowers and their sheer number. We visited the site in the first week in July and the plants were in full flower, and I couldn't help but be reminded of when I lived in South Wales and spent a lot of time botanising in the dune slacks at Kenfig. Its worldwide distribution stretches from Siberia to the Atlantic though becoming rarer further north. In France its distribution is very scattered, possibly reflecting the availability of suitable alkaline wetlands, it is more abundant on the foothills of the Jura and Alps. In Britain it is very much a coastal plant in England and Wales, spreading inland where suitable habitats occur, especially in the fens and broads of East Anglia. It occurs throughout central Ireland.

In passing I must mention a few of the other Helleborines that do occur on the plateau, notably *Cephalanthera longifolia*, which appears in early May, then *Cephalanthera damasonium* in early June closely followed by *Cephalanthera rubra*. *Epipactis helleborine*, *Epipactis muelleri* and *Epipactis microphylla* all show themselves in early July, usually well hidden in the deeper shaded areas.

One close relation of *E. helleborine* that I can't leave out is *Epipactis tremolsii*, which was once considered to be a subspecies of *E. helleborine*. It doesn't occur on our upland plateau, but we saw it flowering on the doorstep of a friend's house, 20 km south of us, on the edge of a small vineyard carved out of the local scrub oak-garrigue. It has spikes of tightly packed flowers with a deep pink/red labellum and a green hood tinged with pink; a lovely plant. In France its distribution is restricted to the foothills edging the coastal plain around the Mediterranean.



Fig. 14: *Epipactis tremolsii*

It appears that I have been a generous Baker, but then our Plateau in France and its surrounding area is a very generous place.

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Goldilocks – A New Forest Beauty Vincent Blood

In late August 2020, I visited an area of heathland in the southwest of the New Forest. After a very pleasant walk observing various fungi and late summer flowers (such as Devil's Bit Scabious) I headed back to my car along a wide, grassy track. Amongst some close-cropped heather I saw around a dozen spikes of Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) in flower. Although it's a species that can be encountered fairly frequently in the New Forest, it was nonetheless pleasing to see them as it was the first occasion I'd found any in this particular location.

Among them was one spike with just a couple of barely open flowers, and the whole inflorescence distinctly yellowish. My natural thought was 'Aww, poor thing is suffering and dying back', so with barely a second glance I continued on my way and thought nothing more about it.

On September 6th 2020 (around a week later) I revisited the area with my wife and daughter in tow. We ended up on pretty much the same route I'd previously taken, so on the way back to the car we passed the small colony of Autumn Lady's-tresses. The same yellow spike was there – but it had doubled in height since my first sighting of it! I was intrigued – if it was dying, as I'd initially thought, then how could it possibly have grown so much? I hunkered down to ground level and examined it more closely. The centre of the flower lip was not green but yellow, and there was just a hint of green at the tips of the bracts and bracteoidal leaves. The basal leaves were a paler green than usual and looked healthy. I took photos of the plant with my DSLR camera and mobile phone (Fig. 1). Once done, I hurried after my family who were not quite so enthusiastic about my find! I posted images on a social media orchid group, where it drew interest from several experts who considered it very unusual. Given the species, I gave the individual the almost inevitable name 'Goldilocks'.

In April 2021 I dropped in on the plant. I was able to locate it again and thankfully it had survived and produced four basal rosettes. The leaves of all four were paler green than other nearby Autumn Lady's-tresses – with a tinge of yellow towards the edge particularly on the older leaves (Fig. 2). In mid-August, as flowering time approached, I visited as often as I could to check on the progress of Goldilocks. When the inflorescences first came through the short turf on 28th August they were fairly green – but noticeably paler than surrounding plants. Even better there were three spikes (Fig. 3)! I felt confident that the straw-gold colour of the previous year would develop as the spikes expanded and the chlorophyll diffused. I also noted the plant was behind the others in the colony in terms of development. One can postulate this is potentially the result of the chlorophyll deficiency affecting photosynthesis and therefore slowing growth.

By September 7th, the golden colour was intensifying, and a fourth spike had emerged. The flowers had opened well on some of the spikes, showing off the yellow lip centres (Fig. 4). Five days later I set off bright and early to obtain some further images in soft, morning sunlight. As I approached, I was a little puzzled that I could not see the plant – and I thought I was in the wrong spot. With an impending sense of



doom, I ascertained I was in exactly the right location, but all 4 spikes were gone without a trace. Heart pounding, I searched the grazed vegetation, and thankfully the leaf rosettes were all intact. Still a little disappointing, as the flowers would have been at their best – so I will have to hope 2022 will produce further opportunities. Interestingly other paler specimens of Autumn Lady's-tresses were noted elsewhere in the UK in 2021, though not as yellow.

One salutary lesson that was driven home in finding this lovely plant is to keep on searching and checking. It was practically the last orchid I saw in 2020, and without doubt the highlight of the season. Just one thing still puzzles me, who was it that nibbled Goldilocks? Maybe it was the revenge of the Three Bears!

Figs. 1-4: *Spiranthes spiralis* 'Goldilocks'



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