

**Journal  
of the  
HARDY ORCHID SOCIETY**



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### Cover Photograph

The front cover features Neil Hubbard's *Orchis italica* which won Class 9 and Best in Show Trophy in the 2023 Plant Show. Photo by Jon Evans.

**Password for Members' Area of HOS Website: monkey22**

**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](http://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**

This time we have an issue with orchid articles from both home base and from mainland Europe. Vercors has justifiably been a regular feature in *JHOS* over the years and Clare & Johan Hermans provide a new, nicely illustrated article. We have results from the 2023 plant show including Jon Evan's excellent photography. Elsewhere, we have another interesting contribution from Colin & Angela Scrutton, this time from their trip to Crete. Details of the anthocyanin-rich form of Common Spotted-orchid in Kent from David Johnson and an early report from this year's field trip programme from Richard Kulczycki round off the Summer *JHOS*. As always do keep sending in articles. Although we have a few in hand, most are quite chunky and some shorter pieces would be most welcome as it helps with space filling.

## **Chairman's Note**

### **Celia Wright**

I'm writing this as HOS has moved forward successfully through a new UK orchid season, now coming towards the end of its busiest period. Use of the Forum to request and give help with finding orchid species has never been better used and many of us have seen special species for the first time. I would particularly like to thank Richard Kulczycki for organising such a varied programme of field trips that have been well supported. For some of the rarer species, members had to visit in shifts to avoid swamping the sites, so many wanted to be there. I had hoped to take a group to Minera Quarry, but for the second year running, the site had been so short of rain that I was advised by the local wardens to cancel the trip. We hope for better luck next year. Richard will have help with the field trips in the north of Britain from now on as Charlie Philpotts, who lives near Leeds, has offered to work with him. Together, they hope to build up an even better and more widely spread list of trips for 2024. Do get in touch with them if you'd like to offer a trip next year.

In June Iain and I put on a successful stand at Malvern International Orchid Show where we won a Silver Medal for the HOS stand of photographs and written information and a few cultivated orchids grown in pots. Our display was designed to introduce the world of hardy orchids to both tropical orchid producers and the general public, covering native orchids in their wild habitats, orchids cultivated in a garden, propagation and other topics. I'd like to thank Moira and Simon Tarrant and Christopher Snelson for helping to man the stand and talking to a very interested public about our native orchids and the role of HOS. It was wonderful to see how many local visitors were keen to encourage native orchids in their gardens or fields.

Booking forms for the Leeds meeting in September and Kidlington in November are enclosed with this Journal. Do come to these meetings if you can. Where else can you spend a day with hardy orchid friends learning about the plants we all love? We have a good mixed programme for Leeds, including Dave Roberts talking on "Trends in the International Trade in Hardy Orchids". The programme for Kidlington is incomplete, so if you have a talk to offer, please get in touch as soon as possible.

This autumn, led by Moira Tarrant in her role as Publicity Officer, we are focusing on our Conservation Grants. HOS can afford to use some money each year to support a small number of relatively low-cost projects, very often managed by volunteers who are passionate about their local orchid populations and want to look after them for everyone to enjoy. For 2022 a grant went to Monkton Nature Reserve (Thanet Countryside Trust) to provide orchid protection by installing rabbit-proof enclosures combined with trialled use of various environmentally friendly, non-lethal repellents. An information board will help to make visitors aware of orchids.

The 2024 funding round is now open for bids, so Moira has produced leaflets and posters to send to local conservation organisations encouraging them to ask for a grant. If there is a local organisation in your area that you believe could benefit from a grant, do direct them to the HOS website. My best wishes to you all.

## **Occurrence in Kent of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila*, the anthocyanin-rich form of the Common Spotted-orchid**

**David Johnson**

As its name suggests, the Common Spotted-orchid, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, is probably the most abundant and frequently encountered orchid both in the county of Kent and throughout the British Isles. Its favoured habitats are very wide ranging and in Kent it grows on dry calcareous grassland on the downs, on open grassy banks and on scrubby sites. It also thrives in woodland along rides, edges and clearings and can tolerate shade. Importantly in Kent it readily colonises man-made habitats such as abandoned chalk and gravel pits where it often forms large colonies.

In its usual form the lip of the Common Spotted-orchid is pink or lilac (often very pale) and marked with darker dashes and loops. Occasionally, however, the patterning is replaced by a central or overall reddish-purple blotch. This is a particularly handsome colour form where the plant has enriched levels of anthocyanins (pigments that produce reddish or purple colouration). In the extreme, the reddish-purple blotch may cover the whole lip, with the leaves plain, but very dark green or bronze coloured. Where the anthocyanin levels are less intense, the blotch may only cover the central part of the lip leaving a white or pale pink margin, and in those plants the leaves are usually plain and of a mid-green colour.

Blotched anthocyanin-rich variants of this type were first described in a paper by Richard Bateman and Ian Denholm published in 1989. A couple of years later, Derek Turner-Ettlinger (1991) recognised this variant of the Common Spotted-orchid, and considered



Fig. 1: *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from a disused chalk pit near Dartford (1970).  
Photo by Alan Blackman

it to be worthy of the rank of variety, naming it *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila*. Ettliger later published two photographs of var. *rhodochila* in his 'Illustrations of British and Irish Orchids' taken in Derbyshire and Durham (Ettliger 1998, p.138-139). Blotched plants like those first described by Bateman and Denholm in their 1989 paper must always have existed, but oddly enough there seem to be very few instances of their documentation in past literature. However, David Lang in his 'Wild Orchids of Sussex' (2001) did mention that such a plant was found in 1870 at Patching in West Sussex.

I cannot trace any very old records from Kent which could be attributed to var. *rhodochila*, but in 1970 HOS member Alan Blackman photographed a variant plant amongst a colony of *D. fuchsii* in a disused chalk pit at Stone near Dartford in North Kent (Fig. 1). At the time Alan consulted several experts as to whether this was a known variant, but without enlightenment. It was not until he saw the Ettliger photographs almost 30 years later that he realised his plant was var. *rhodochila*. The chalk pit where Alan found the plant has long since been filled and built upon, but the record remains as the first documented instance of var. *rhodochila* for Kent.



Fig. 2. *D. Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from old gravel workings, Sevenoaks (2005).

Photo by David Johnson

Subsequent to Ettliger naming the blotched variant, examples of var. *rhodochila* seem to have cropped up regularly from many counties across Britain, and Kent is no exception. In their 1989 paper Bateman and Denholm referred to one of their study populations of *D. fuchsii* where about 20% were of the blotched colour variant, so it was maybe no surprise when a large population of *D. fuchsii* recorded in the 1990s from old gravel workings at Sevenoaks in west Kent were found to hold a significant number of var. *rhodochila*. I first saw these plants in 2005 when about 50 var. *rhodochila* were flowering amongst a colony of several hundred Common Spotted-orchids. These variants were mainly of the extreme anthocyanin-rich form (Fig. 2) with the whole lip blotched dark reddish purple and the leaves bronze or very dark green. This colony still persists although in much reduced numbers.

From the other end of the county near the Kent coast several var. *rhodochila* were



Fig. 3. *D Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from chalky roadside bank Dover (2006).  
Photo by David Johnson



Fig. 4. *D Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from open chalk downland near Bromley (2012).  
Photo by Grant Hazlehurst

recorded from a roadside nature reserve near Dover flowering within a small colony of *D. fuchsii* on a steep chalky bank. These were very striking flowers (Figs. 3) with central reddish-purple blotches and a wide white margin to the lip. The leaves were plain and of a mid-green colour. I first saw these plants in 2006, but I understand they had been flowering since at least 2003, and one or two still survive.

Back to the north of the county, and in 2011 in a large chalk quarry between Gravesend and Dartford an anthocyanin-rich var. *rhodochila* was recorded flowering in a scrubby area with a large colony of *D. fuchsii*. Nearby there were also several Pyramidal Orchids and a group of Bee Orchids. The lip of this plant had a large central reddish-purple blotch with a narrow whitish edging and leaves that were dark green, fused bronze. It was a rather handsome specimen with some 20 florets. I have seen pictures but have no useable photographs I can share. Unfortunately, this quarry is now being developed as part of the new Ebbsfleet Garden City and the site has vanished.

The following year, 2012, a good example of var. *rhodochila* was found in the west of the county on Darwin's famous 'Orchis Bank' at Downe near Bromley, which is now a Kent Wildlife Trust reserve. It was growing on one of the chalky downland slopes together with large numbers of *D. fuchsii* and *Gymnadenia conopsea* (Chalk Fragrant-orchid). This was another very attractive flower with a large central reddish-purple blotch and a narrow pinkish-white margin to the lip (Fig. 4). The plant persisted for a few years, but there have been no recent reports.





More recently, in 2019, there was a very exciting find from the Medway area of Kent. On a calcareous grassland plateau within woods near Chatham several var. *rhodochila* were found flowering within a large colony of *D. fuchsii*. By 2021 when the photographs were taken, numbers of the variant had increased to double figures. They were of the extreme anthocyanin-rich form with deep burgundy coloured lips (Figs. 5 & 6) and very dark green leaves (Fig. 8). They are some of the very best examples I have ever seen of the intense form of var. *rhodochila*. The surrounding colony of *D. fuchsii* also contained some stunningly beautiful examples of normal plants with unusually deep purple patterning (Fig. 7).

The most recent instance of the variant came from near Dartford in north Kent when in 2022 Geoffrey Kitchener, our county recorder, found a fine specimen of var. *rhodochila* growing with other *D. fuchsii* in shade on a chalk embankment within the recently designated Swanscombe Peninsula SSSI. It was of the extreme anthocyanin-rich form (Fig. 9) with leaves very dark green/bronze (Fig. 10). Other interesting plants growing close-by included much *Pyrola rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Wintergreen), a Kent rarity, and let us hope that the SSSI status of the site will offer protection from the threatened scheme to construct an enormous theme park on the Peninsula.



Figs. 5-8. *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from Grassland plateau within woods near Chatham (2021).

Figs. 9 & 10. *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *rhodochila* from a shaded chalk embankment near Dartford (2022).

Photos by Daphne Mills (5-8) & Geoffrey Kitchener (9 & 10)

From the above Kentish records it would seem that var. *rhodochila*, although uncommon, is widespread and regularly occurs across the county amongst populations of the ubiquitous *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. I look forward to hearing of the discovery in Kent of more instances of this charismatic variant in the near future.

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- Lang, D.C. (2001) *Wild Orchids of Sussex*. Lewes, Pomegranate Press.

## HOS Photographic Competition 2023

### Entry details for Kidlington, November 19<sup>th</sup> 2023

Please note that the rule stating entries for any class must be photographed within the current or preceding calendar year has now been removed.

Email digital entries to Neil Evans, [neilevans@hardyorchidsociety.org](mailto:neilevans@hardyorchidsociety.org), or use a file transfer service for larger files, by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023. For print entries email Neil by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 with the classes to be entered and a digital copy of the image. For entrants who are unable to attend the meeting Neil will accept postal entries and will take them to the meeting for you. Enclose an SAE if return of the prints is required. Please see inside cover of the Journal for Neil's postal address.

Please name your files in the following format Your Full Name, Class, Name of Orchid, Location.

There are changes to both the Schedule of Classes and Rules. These can be found on the website <https://hardyorchidsociety.org.uk/photocomp.html>

## 2023 Video Competition

The HOS Video Competition will be held during the HOS Autumn Northern Meeting. The Tony Hughes Trophy is awarded to the best video. The winning video will also be shown at the following Autumn Southern Meeting.

Entries must be sent in advance to the Video Competition Organiser, either by email, or for larger files, using one of the free transfer services such as WeTransfer or Dropbox. See the HOS website for further details. For 2023 the Video Competition Organiser will be Steve Pickersgill email: [hosvc@hardyorchidsociety.org](mailto:hosvc@hardyorchidsociety.org). The closing date for videos to reach him is August 16<sup>th</sup>.

## Broad-leaved Helleborine at Monkton Nature Reserve



Broad-leaved Helleborine  
Photo by Clive Nuttman

The Hardy Orchid Society Conservation Grant for 2022 was awarded to Monkton Nature Reserve and Dr Clive Nuttman has just given us an update on their orchids in 2023:

“We’ve had a wonderful year for orchids; I will write in more detail once our summer holiday season is over, with the results of our protection efforts that you generously funded. One great find was the discovery yesterday of a single flowering Broad-leaved Helleborine (our 13<sup>th</sup> orchid overall and the 11<sup>th</sup> species in flower this year), a first record for the reserve and almost certainly the first time it has been found in the wider Thanet district. Once again, thank you for your support and interest.

## Results of HOS Plant Show 2023

### Class 1: Three pots native British orchids, distinct varieties.

1st Neil Hubbard: *Anacamptis morio* (a), *Orchis anthropophora* (b),  
*Orchis mascula* (c)

### Class 2: Three pots native European (not native to Britain) orchids, distinct varieties.

1st Neil Hubbard: *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* (a), *Dactylorhiza romana* (b),  
*Orchis italica* (c)

**Class 7: One pot non-European orchid.**

1st Malcolm Brownsword: *Calanthe striata* var. *sieboldii*

**Class 8: One pot *Dactylorhiza*.**

1st Neil Hubbard: *Dactylorhiza sambucina*

**Class 9: One pot Orchis, Anacamptis or Neotinea.**

1st Neil Hubbard: *Orchis italica*

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter Ward: *Anacamptis morio*

3<sup>rd</sup> Moira Tarrant: *Orchis anthropophora*

**Class 10: One pot *Ophrys*.**

1st Moira Tarrant: *Ophrys lutea*

2<sup>nd</sup> Neil Hubbard: *Ophrys scolopax*

**Class 11: One pot *Serapias*.**

1st Neil Hubbard: *Serapias lingua*

**Class 13: One pot *Calanthe*.**

1st Malcolm Brownsword: *Calanthe tsoongiana*

2<sup>nd</sup> Michael Powell: *Calanthe Takane* (*striata* × *discolor*)

**Class 16: One plant or pan of plants raised from seed by the grower.**

1<sup>st</sup> Peter Ward: *Anacamptis morio* [Grower's Trophy]

**Winner of Best in Show Trophy:**

Neil Hubard for *Orchis italica* in Class 9

**Chairman's Award**

Moira Tarrant for *Ophrys lutea* in Class 10

**Grower's Trophy**

Peter Ward for *Anacamptis morio* in Class 16

**Banksian Medal**

Neil Hubbard

Thanks to Nick Fry for judging the Plant Show

All of the first place winning entries are featured on the following pages. Numbers match the Class entered and the position . For Classes 1 and 2 the three plants are identified by a letter (a-c) as indicated in the results.

All photos by Jon Evans

1



1a



1b



1c



2



2a



2b



2c



7



8



8



9



10



11



13



16





# Greenwings

## Wildlife Holidays

Forthcoming botanical tours include:

**Greece: The Pindos** 18 - 25 Jun £1,295

A week of gentle paced excursions in the dramatic scenery of the Pindos Mountains with highly experienced botanist Yiannis Christofides.

**France: The Vercors** 30 Jun - 7 Jul £1,495

Enjoy the later season flowers of this rich part of southeast France with a wealth of butterflies too in the company of renowned natural history illustrator, Richard Lewington.

**Greece: Crete** 27 Oct - 4 Nov £1,295

Join Yiannis Christofides exploring this beautiful island in search of Crocus, Colchicum, Cyclamen, Galanthus, Narcissus and more in the autumn sunshine of the Mediterranean.

**South Africa: The Drakensberg** 17 - 31 Jan 2024 £3,795

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## The fabulous orchids of the Vercors, South-east France

### Part 1 Introducing the orchids of Vercors

Clare & Johan Hermans

For orchid seekers, some places hit all the right notes; for us, Madagascar has done so since 1990 and this was joined more recently by the Vercors region of France. Our first visit was in early June 2015 inspired by an article by Hilary and Steve Pickersgill in the *JHOS*. The big attraction was the possibility of seeing *Cypripedium calceolus* in the wild as we had little hope of finding it in the UK. After some research, we booked a gîte and set off; little did we know it would be the first of our annual pilgrimages to the area, only interrupted by Covid.



Fig. 1: Our base near the town of Die.  
All Photographs by Johan Hermans

We arranged to stay a couple of days with friends in Burgundy conveniently located about halfway on the 780-mile drive. The added bonus was not only the wine produced on their property but also the orchids in their grounds: *Himatoglossum hircinum* grew in abundance and the old grass tennis court had been allowed to become a wildflower meadow, where *Ophrys insectifera*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Orchis anthropophora* together with Aquilegias enjoyed the dappled shade before the surrounding boxwood (*Buxus*) was totally devastated by box tree caterpillars. Thankfully, later visits confirmed the orchids simply adapted to their changed environment.

The car loaded with some fine wine and ample provisions from the local market we set off for the mountains. Our destination was just beyond the ancient town of Die situated on the river Drôme at the southern edge of the Vercors. The rented Gîte was a simple affair with two rooms up and down. Originally it had been a small barn with very thick stone walls, it was idyllically situated in total solitude on a hillside overlooking vineyards, walnut plantations, and the mountains in the distance. Pockets of conifer woodland were interspersed with boxwood, the yellow flowers of broom (*Cytisus*), thymes and many other spring flowers. Orchids too were flourishing with *Ophrys apifera* and the now familiar *Himantoglossum hircinum* thriving on the doorstep. An ancient Mulberry tree, left over from the days of silk production, provided welcome shade for the terrace and dining table. Meals were accompanied by a concert of close-by nightingales that started serenading at breakfast, continuing most of the day until joined by the whirring calls of nightjars, cuckoos and owls for evening meals.

Our base was ideally situated at the climatic limit between the northern and southern Alps. On one side the hotter, more arid part with a Mediterranean climate and flora. To the north the Vercors massif, which is lush, greener, and cooler; it is 65 km long and 35 km wide and was declared a National Park in 1985. It is an overlap area between the Mediterranean and Northern floras which makes it so interesting botanically. The underlying geology is mainly limestone and forms the western flank of the Alps; it features many deep gorges and caves. A few summits are above 2000 m along the eastern edge; one of the most striking is Mont Aiguille standing isolated at 2086 m. The western slopes are gentler and have higher sun exposure than the eastern ones.

Using locality information in the Pickersgill article and French Orchid Society's (Société Française d'Orchidophilie (SFO), now Fédération France Orchidées (FFO), publications we set off for the mountains. Ascent is via the few mountain roads to the various Cols; this invariably involves a great number of tight hairpin bends which takes some getting used to driving on the wrong side of the road and coming from one of the flattest counties in the UK. The roads are not busy but extra spice is added by the disproportionate number of motor bikers who seem to use these Cols as their playground.

One of our favourite climbs was the Col de Ménéce at around 1500 m; soon the verges were dotted with the very pretty *Orchis purpurea*, nearby in bright sunshine were swathes of the pink and sweetly scented *Gymnadenia conopsea* amidst a sea of yellow flowers. Another meadow had huge populations of *Orchis mascula*, coming to the end of their flowering but still a great spectacle. Soon enough an ideal picnic site revealed itself; a large meadow surrounded by pine forest and on the edge numerous plants of *Orchis purpurea*, *Orchis militaris*, and many hybrids between them (*Orchis* × *hybrida*).



Fig. 2: *Orchis mascula* in the Combeau valley (3<sup>rd</sup> June).

Our destination was Col du Prayet on the eastern side of the main ridge and at 1197 m a little lower than Col de Menée. It turned out to be an orchid paradise. Along the fringe of a meadow, there were old friends but there were also two new species of *Dactylorhiza*; the mauve *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and *D. viridis*, its orange-green colouring, which was hard to spot amongst the grass. Its frog shape only became obvious in close-up and with some imagination. There were some locally damp patches with the ground covered by mosses, where *Platanthera bifolia* was thriving together with small groups of the pretty *Neotinea ustulata*. Then we stumbled over what we had hoped to see – our first clump of *Cypripedium calceolus* hiding beneath a small tree in the semi shade. The brown of the petals blended with the shadows making it difficult to spot but the bright yellow of the pouch is always a give-away. On closer inspection we were pleased to see nearby seedlings and more plants in the vicinity. In a more exposed part of the bank were some tall spikes of *Ophrys insectifera*, the rarer *Orchis spitzelii* with pretty brownish pink flowers and also *Cephalanthera damasonium* and the glorious *Cephalanthera rubra*. A quick check and we realised that on this small bank of just a few square meters we had seen no fewer than seventeen different orchids in flower.

A little deeper in the forest, in dappled shade we were attracted by the beautiful bright blue flowers of *Gentiana acaulis* carpeting the ground accompanied by orchids like *Cephalanthera longifolia*. *Neottia ovata* was also very common. Although its flowers are insignificant, colonies of large plants can be an impressive sight. Not as common but equally widespread was the miniscule *Neottia cordata*. Intermixed, often in deep shade was the orange *Neottia nidus-avis*. At higher altitude both the yellow and red colour forms of *Dactylorhiza sambucina* were common.

Hiking higher in the forest with occasional glimpses of the statuesque Mont Aiguille the terrain became more inapproachable with many subsidiary ridges and a very shallow loose soil overlying bare chalk rock. Moreover, rain earlier in the week had made it very slippery. But the botanical richness made up for this, with Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*), pretty blue Aquilegias and bright yellow flowers of *Trollius europaeus* covering the ground. Amongst this were several specimen plants of *Cypripedium calceolus* with larger, darker flowers than those seen in more exposed areas. This small patch is one of the few localities where *Corallorhiza trifida* is found, a leafless geophyte with a very wide distribution in Europe and the subarctic but becoming increasingly scarce. After wading across small streams and marshland we found a few plants but virtually all flowers had been consumed by a discerning escargot and we had to make do with a drift of some pretty white daffodils. On the return journey we had more luck and under a large tree-trunk in virtually complete shade were the pretty yellow-green flowers of the *Corallorhiza*. The whole plant is only 10 cm tall and the flowers just a few millimetres so photography in virtual darkness, lying in soggy black rotting humus was a challenge.

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**The following four pages present a display of orchid photographs from Vercors. Their identification captions follow on page 98.**





11



4



13



14





15



16



17



18



### Images on the previous four page

- Fig. 3: *Gymnadenia conopsea*, Col de Menée (1<sup>st</sup> June).  
Fig. 4: *Orchis militaris*, a pale form on the Pas du Serpaton above Gresse-en-Vercors (8<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 5: *Orchis* × *hybrida* (*O. militaris* × *O. purpurea*) at Rochefort Samson St-Gens (12<sup>th</sup> May).  
Fig. 6: *Dactylorhiza viridis*, Combeau valley (3<sup>rd</sup> June).  
Fig. 7: *Platanthera bifolia*, Col du Prayet (8<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 8: *Neotinea ustulata*, Col de Tourmiol (7<sup>th</sup> May).  
Fig. 9: *Cephalanthera rubra*, Col des Limouches (2<sup>nd</sup> June).  
Fig. 10: *Orchis spitzelii*, Col du Prayet (3<sup>rd</sup> June).  
Fig. 11: *Cephalanthera damasonium*, on the road to Tressanes (10<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 12: *Cypripedium calceolus*, Col du Prayet (10<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 13: *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, purple form in Combeau valley (3<sup>rd</sup> June).  
Fig. 14: *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, yellow form in Combeau valley (13<sup>th</sup> May).  
Fig. 15: *Cephalanthera longifolia*, Col du Prayet (10<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 16: *Neottia cordata*, Col du Prayet (11<sup>th</sup> May).  
Fig. 17: *Corallorhiza trifida*, Col du Prayet (8<sup>th</sup> June).  
Fig. 18: *Himantoglossum hircinum*, a common roadside herb (3<sup>rd</sup> June).

## Giant Orchid (*Himantoglossum robertianum*) in the UK Richard Kulczycki

Recent years have seen some unexpected orchid finds in Britain – for example, four *Serapias* species have been found. As I write I have no idea what surprises this season has brought, but I expect there will have been some.

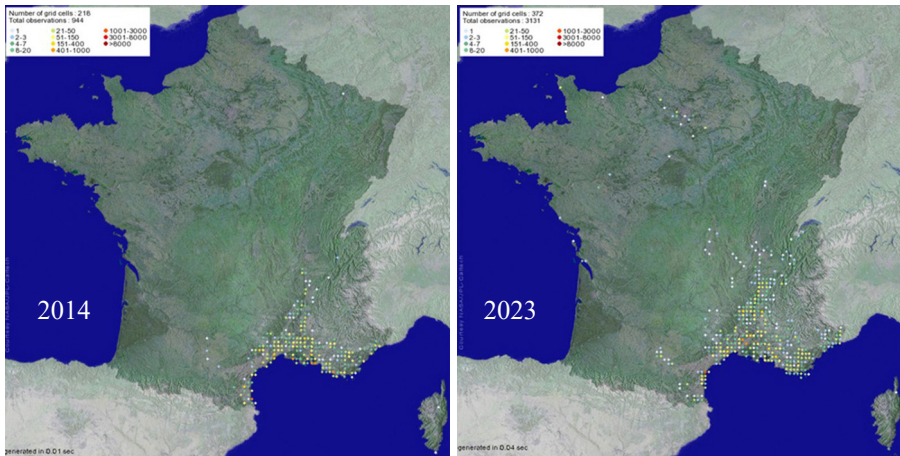
Last year the Guardian carried a story that the Giant Orchid had been found in the UK – near Didcot, which I believe has not been known as a prime orchid location until now. The story appeared on April 1<sup>st</sup> but seemed to be totally credible in all other respects. A young orchid enthusiast called Hamza Nobes had found this species ten minutes from his house. I posted a link to the piece on the Forum and, just as I was going to bed, I was surprised to get an email from Hamza himself. It turned out Hamza was a member of HOS. Although Hamza has only been interested in orchids for a few years, he already had an extensive knowledge of many British and European species. Hamza later agreed to organise a field trip in 2023 should the plants reappear. They did.

True to his word, Hamza organised a trip for 26<sup>th</sup> March. In the weeks before there was much agonising. The winter was long with no warm spells. The plants were not growing fast enough and were not developing flower spikes. Moreover the leaves were being eaten, possibly by slugs, although the molluscs were not being seen.

There was so much interest that Hamza organised six groups of us. Suddenly this had possibly become the largest field trip ever. We met on the day and there were six flowering plants, nine plants in total. The plants were growing on the grass-covered side of a disused railway embankment – the other side was scrub and contained no plants. The flower spikes were smaller than in 2022, but were perfectly formed. Moreover, a couple of sharp-eyed members immediately discovered a new plant growing forty yards away from the others.

Some of us will have seen the Giant Orchid in the Mediterranean. However, as it is an early season flowerer, it is usually going over when we see it at the peak of the *Ophrys* season. Here we saw it with its frills intact and in all its foppish purple and olive-green prime. As we use anthropocentric names for many of our “figure” orchids, perhaps this should be the Regency Dandy orchid?

The Giant Orchid has spread its range in recent years. It was mostly confined to the Mediterranean until about ten years ago, since when it has spread northwards. There are now outlier plants throughout mainland France. It has also appeared in Belgium, southern Germany and the Alps generally. In March 2020 it was found in the Netherlands as well as Israel and Bulgaria in 2023. The Dutch plants are in the coastal dunes between Den Haag and Haarlem (Noordwijk) and have now survived both heavy frost and late snow.



These maps, from the French site Orchisauvage ([www.orchisauvage.fr](http://www.orchisauvage.fr)), show how rapidly it has spread in France in the last decade. It now has a substantial presence in both the Rhone and the Seine valleys. There are also multiple sites on both the Atlantic and Channel coasts. This is a big change from the map in the *Field Guide to European Orchids* (Cribb *et al.* 2019). So, in the space of a few years, the Giant Orchid has become a north-western European orchid.

It turned out that Bill Temple had been made aware of a single plant growing at the UK site in 2007, which he visited that year and once again in 2008. In 2009 it was absent and Bill assumed it had gone for good. He did in fact mention this plant in a piece on the Hartslock hybrids in *JHOS* (Temple 2011). Bill always assumed someone planted it here. However, it appears that rather than die away, the original plant and its descendants have spread seed over a fifty metre area along the embankment. When the sun came out we observed many insect visitors, including bees and bumble bees. Indeed some of you kindly posted photos of these insect visitors to the Forum (see Forum around 26<sup>th</sup> March). This orchid is actually a “deceiver” and Italian research has shown it can produce a wide range of organic scent compounds. There is some evidence that the orchid may vary these scents over time to prevent insects associating them with a failure to receive any reward (De Agostini *et al.* 2022).



Giant Orchid, *Himantoglossum robertianum* in the UK.  
Photos by Hamza Nobes (above)  
& Richard Kulczycki (opposite page)

Hamza counted over fifty plants in February but it appears many were eaten later. While initially it was thought this was slug damage, it is now clear that this was due to deer. From speaking to local walkers, we know there are three species of deer present: muntjac, roe and a herd of fallow deer. It appears that the plants were eaten in February and little further damage occurred in March, but this is conjecture. This Giant Orchid colony’s potential size may be much reduced by deer herbivory, but it very much seems that *Himantoglossum robertianum* is here to stay on our island. And I am quite dandy with that.

Thanks to Bill Temple, Keith Boseley, Neil Hubbard, Denise Harper, Eric Harper, Paul van Maaren, Jean Claessens and especially Hamza Nobes for contributing to this article and to making our field trip possible. Hamza has kindly offered to repeat this trip next year.

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## Spring Orchids on Crete Colin & Angela Scrutton

Crete originated as a slice of ocean floor thrust up by the compression of Africa against Europe. The south-western part of the island is mountainous, reaching 2456m in Mount Psiloritis, with lower land to the north. Between the peaks in the south-west is richest for orchids. We spent a very profitable week there in April 2011, based near Heraklion and concentrating on the western end of the island. Previously, Webb (2015 and 2021) has described visits to the island in Spring and Autumn with excellent pictures of some of the orchids she found. For this article, we are using the orchid classification of Kühn *et al.* (2019).

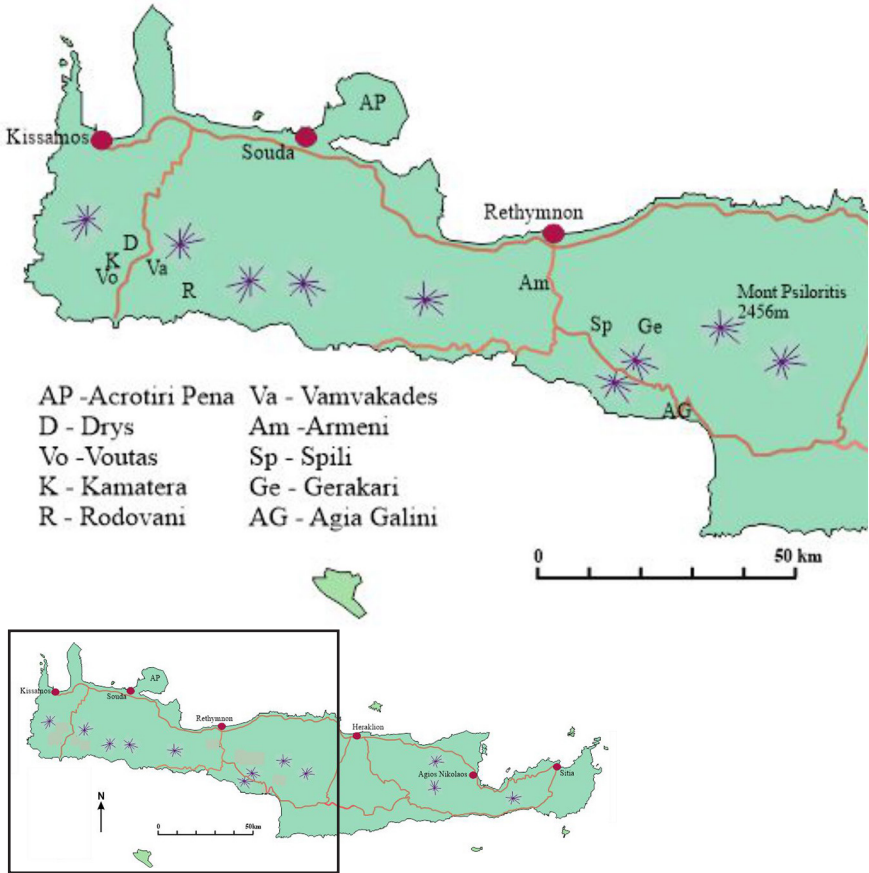


Fig. 1: Map of Crete showing selected roads and peaks over 1000m. All localities mentioned in the text are shown.  
All photos by Colin Scrutton

The map (Fig. 1) shows the localities we visited. On our first day we explored the Akrotiri Peninsula which yielded a rich haul of species, including *Ophrys bombyliflora*, which was particularly common, *Ophrys cretica*, *Ophrys fuciflora* ssp. *fuciflora*, *Ophrys lutea* ssp. *galilaea*, *Ophrys lutea* ssp. *lutea*, *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, *Ophrys scolopax* ssp. *cornuta*, *Ophrys scolopax* ssp. *heldreichii*, *Orchis italica* and *Serapias lingua*. The two subspecies of *Ophrys scolopax* differ in little more than the details of their terminal appendages; a broad, curved plate in front view in *cornuta* and a narrow vertical blade in *heldreichii*.



Figs. 2-4: *Ophrys bombyliflora*. Figs. 5-6: *Ophrys cretica*. Figs. 7-8: *Ophrys lutea* ssp. *galilaea*. Figs. 9-10: *Ophrys tenthredinifera*. Figs. 11-12: *Ophrys scolopax* ssp. *cornuta*. Figs. 13-14: *Ophrys scolopax* ssp. *heldreichii*. Fig. 15: *Orchis italica*. All from Akrotiri Peninsula. [Scales, Figs. 2 & 15 10cm, Figs. 3-14 1cm]



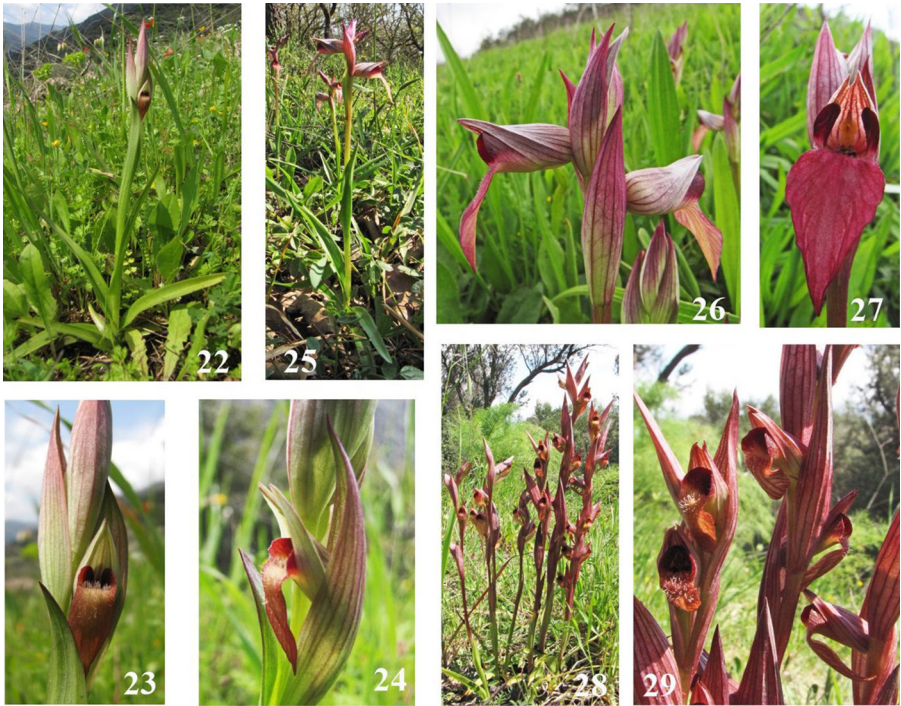
Figs. 16 & 17: *Anacamptis collina*. Fig. 18: *Anacamptis laxiflora*.  
 Figs. 19-20: *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *cretensis*. Fig. 21: *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *mammosa*. All from Drys.

[Scales: Fig. 16 10cm; Figs. 17-21 1cm]

On our second day, we started at the tiny village of Drys where, in the surrounding grasslands, we saw *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *mammosa*, *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *cretensis*, *Anacamptis collina*, *Anacamptis laxiflora* and *S. lingua*. We also saw *A. collina* a little further south, near Kamatera and whilst continuing south to the area around Voutas, *Orchis italica*, *Orchis quadripunctata*, *Ophrys cretica*, *Op. lutea* ssp. *galilaea* and *Op. sphegodes* ssp. *mammosa* were in flower.

We returned to the south-west corner of Crete on our third day, beginning in the area around Rodovani, which yielded the richest haul of species yet. We saw *Orchis simia*, *Anacamptis papillionacea* ssp. *papilionacea*, *Ophrys omegaifera* ssp. *omegaifera*, *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *sphogodes*, and *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *spruneri*. None of these turned up at any of the other sites we visited and in addition we saw *Orchis pauciflora*, *Neotinea tridentata* ssp. *tridentata*, *Op. scolopax* ssp. *heldrechii*, *Op. lutea* ssp. *galilaea*, *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *mammosa*, and *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *cretensis*. The area around Vamvakades, nearby to the north-east, was the only site where we found *Anacamptis laxiflora*, a rather pale version of this species but with a complete lack of spotting on the axis of the labellum. The site also yielded *Orchis pauciflora*, *N. tridentata* ssp. *tridentata* and *Neotinea lactea*. The final site in the south-western corner of Crete was at Voutas and the lightly wooded area to the south of the village. Here we saw *O. italica*, *O. quadripunctata*, *Op. cretica*, *Op. lutea* ssp. *galilaea*, *Op. sphegodes* ssp. *mammosa*, *S. lingua* and for the first and only time *Serapias parviflora*.





Figs. 22-24: *Serapias parviflora*, south of Voutas. Figs. 25-27: *Serapias lingua*, from Armeni. Figs. 28-29: *Serapias vomeracea*, north of Agia Galini.

[Scales: Figs. 22, 25 and 28 10cm Figs. 23, 24, 26, 27 and 29, 1cm]

We moved to sites further east and inland from Rethymnon on our fourth day, first the lightly wooded grassland around Armeni. There we saw *O. italica*, *Op. tenthredinifera*, *Op. lutea* ssp. *lutea*, *Op. scolopax* ssp. *heldrechii*, *Op. fuciflora* ssp. *fuciflora* and *S. lingua*. It was the only site where we found *Himantoglossum robertianum* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, although the latter was only just beginning to flower.

From Armeni, we moved on to explore the area between Spili and Gerakari for another rich haul of species. Several, *Orchis anthropophora*, *Anacamptis boryi*, *Ophrys fusca* ssp. *fusca* and *Ophrys omegaifera* ssp. *fleichmannii* we saw nowhere else. *Op. bombiliflora*, *Op. scolopax* ssp. *heldrechii*, *Op. tenthredinifera*, *Op. cretica*, *Op. lutea* ssp. *galilaea*, *O. quadripunctata* and *N. lactea* were also in flower.



Fig. 30: *Ophrys fuciflora* ssp. *fuciflora*, Acrotiri Peninsula. Figs. 31 - 32: *Ophrys lutea* ssp. *lutea*, Acrotiri Peninsula. Figs. 33 - 34: *Ophrys spruneri*, Rodovani. Fig.35: *Orchis pauciflora*, Rodovani. Figs. 36-37: *Anacamptis papilionacea* ssp. *papilionacea*, Rodovani. Fig. 38: *Orchis simia*, Rodovani. Fig. 39: *Neotinea lactea*, Spili-Gerakari. Fig.40: *Neotinea tridentata*, Rodovani. Fig.41: *Orchis quadripunctata*, south of Voutas.

Scale 1cm

The final site we visited was the area north of Aghia Galini, on the south coast. It was the only locality where we saw *Serapias vomeracea*. In addition, *Op. cretica*, *A. collina* and *Op. scolopax* ssp. *heldreichii* were flowering there.

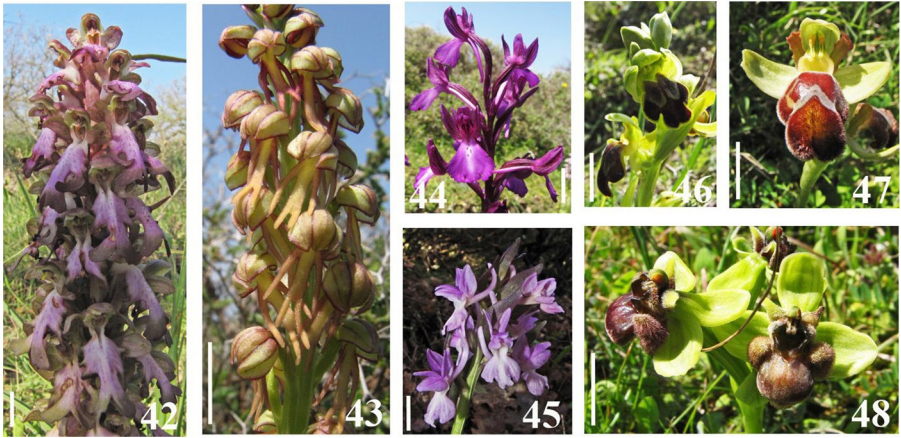


Fig. 42: *Himantoglossum robertianum*, Armeni. Fig.43: *Orchis anthropophora*, Spili-Gerakari. Fig. 44: *Anacamptis boryi*, Spili-Gerakari. Fig. 45: *Anacamptis laxiflora*, Vamvakades. Fig. 46: *Ophrys fusca* ssp. *fusca*, Spili-Gerakari. Fig. 47: *Ophrys omegaifera* ssp. *omegaifera*, Rodovani. Fig. 48: *Ophrys bombyliflora*, Spili-Gerakari.

Scales, Figs. 42, 43 10cm. Figs. 44-48, 1cm

Overall, we saw some 35 species and subspecies of orchid, 30 of which we have illustrated. We also made time to take in some of the other features of Crete, particularly the Palace of Knossos near Heraklion, and the history of the Minoan civilization. Altogether, it was one of the best week-long orchid holidays we have enjoyed!

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## Our botanical tours for 2024 include:

### Orchids and Wildlife of Cyprus in Spring 1 - 8 March £1,425

A week in Cyprus in early spring, focusing mainly on the island's myriad orchids, but also enjoying the other wildlife to be found here at this time of year. Orchid treasures we will be looking for include *Orchis punctulata*, and *Ophrys kotschyi*.

### Orchids of Rhodes 1 - 8 April £1,425

Led by Jon Dunn, author of 'Orchid Summer', and Richard Bate, one of the brightest stars in the European orchid scene, our time on Rhodes will be packed with colourful orchids - depending on the season, perhaps approaching 50 species are possible in the space of the week.

### Orchids of Sicily 11 - 18 April £1,495

Situated off the 'toe' of Italy, Sicily is an enticing and rewarding destination for the orchid-hunter, with a variety of habitats packed into a relatively compact island. Jon Dunn and native Sicilian naturalist Andrea Corso will help search for several dozen species, including desirable endemics and near-endemics.

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