

AUGUST 1979

OFFICIAL BULLETIN



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EDITORIAL

In the June issue members were invited to research the biographies of people whose names are given to many of our orchids. As you can see I have produced the one on Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller in this issue and M/s Linda Penny is currently working on the biography of Brown. So come on members, we always need material for the bulletins, don't leave it to the few regular contributors each month.

This would also be an appropriate time to state the editorial policy on articles received and published in the bulletin.

Obviously as editor of a bulletin for a group devoted to the study of native orchids I must ensure that all botanical names used in articles are the correct ones and not superseded and that they are correctly spelt. Also if a statement is made, it must be correct. For example it is no use saying that Vancouver's expedition called in at King George Sound in 1801 if in fact it was 1791. A final point is that for reasons of economy it may be necessary to shorten an article by precis or even omission, to fit it into the number of pages for that month's bulletin. However it should generally be possible to avoid this if I have a stock of small articles to draw upon when I need space fillers. The short biographies would be ideal for this purpose. Other than for spelling errors I intend in the future to send contributors a typewritten draft of their articles, for their approval, where I have made corrections on matters of fact or cut back on the length. If any dispute then arose the matter would be referred to the Committee to which as editor I am responsible.

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The next Committee meeting will be held at the residence of Mrs Alison Harrington [REDACTED]
Tuesday 4th September 1979.

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The next General meeting will be held at the Film Room, Department of Agriculture on the 7th September 1979. The topic for the evening will be a discussion on the variations in the orchid set up. This talk will be given by Mr Ron Heberle.

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August Meeting - President's Report

This meeting was well attended and although there were a few apologies mainly from the President everything went along fairly smoothly. At the Committee meeting on Tuesday it was decided to bring the Royal Show display arrangements to the General Meeting, this was done and the outcome of all the arrangements was Mr Mick Leece has made the back verandah of his house available and Mr Barry Duff has volunteered to organize the materials for the display.

Mr Alex George helped to fill in the rest of the evening with an informal discussion, which brought quite a few members into the action.

There is to be a film session on 5th September by Green-fingers and this was to be filmed at the Reserve at Smythe Road but everything is condensed and it will be detrimental to the reserve, so it has now been decided to pot the orchids for filming. After discussion on this, three members decided to make pots available.

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The raffle of the evening was a native orchid from N.S.W and was won by Mr Des Kruske.

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New Members

We welcome into the group 8 new members:

Colin & Joy St. Jack

Donald & Sally Graham

Sidney & Laurie Gibbings

Mr & Mrs W. Johnson

+ + + + +

Field Trip

Another Field Trip has been organized - This is through the centre.

Meeting Place: Kojonup Roadhouse right hand side from Perth.

Time: 10 am

Date: 8th & 9th September.

Country members please note.

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Reports

Mr Des Kruske brought in a *Thelymitra* and this one proved to be *Thelymitra spiralis* and is a rare orchid. It was found in the near vicinity of the *Caladenia drummondii* find of last year.

Mr Nick Foote arrived just as we were about to go home and he had a beautiful specimen of *Thelymitra variegata* (Queen of Sheba) and this one was found between Cataby and Jurien, on the Brand Highway.

Reports (Contd.)

Mr Herb Foote reported that there is a large development started on the Scenic Drive, South of Mandurah. Another development is in the area bounded by Norwood St. and Hawtin Road.

REDISCOVERY OF THE UNDERGROUND ORCHID, *Rhizanthella gardneri* R.S. Rogers.

By A.S. George, Western Australian Herbarium.

On 26th May 1979 John McGuinness, a farmer at Munglinup east of Ravensthorpe, turned over a dead tree root and unearthed a specimen of *Rhizanthella gardneri*. It was the sixth such chance finding of this intriguing underground orchid and the first since 1959. Mr McGuinness brought the specimen to the Western Australian Herbarium where its identity was confirmed on 28th May.

On June 1st I visited his property and with the assistance of five enthusiasts located 10 more plants. It was the first opportunity to study their growth habits in situ and excavate them. Plants were located by searching for slightly raised, cracked mounds such as are made by fungi before breaking the surface. In eight cases no part of the plant was visible above the ground, but in the other two, where leaf litter had accumulated to a depth of 1-2 cm, a small hole about 1 cm across had been formed by the involucre bracts pushing outwards. Although the flowers remained below ground level the tips of the bracts were slightly above it whether or not covered by a soil "lid". Further observations by Don Voight and a subsequent visit on 1st August showed that all the plants eventually developed a hole during flowering.

The orchids occurred in yellow-brown sandy clay. The vegetation was mallee-broombush with *Melaleuca uncinata* the most frequent shrub. As with previous finds the orchids grew close by the bases of the *Melaleuca*. Mallees included *Eucalyptus redunca*, *E. spathulata*, *E. flocktoniae* and *E. pileata*.

The orchids had a horizontal rhizome from 3 to 12 cm below the surface. New lateral rhizomes were developing and it appears that this vegetative propagation gives rise to clones. Two groups each of four plants had apparently formed in this way, although they were no longer connected by living tissue.

The flowers were deep burgundy with white ovaries, while the bracts were translucent white and rather waxy in texture. A sweet but faint scent similar to that of *Caladenia aphylla* was produced. No observations on pollination were recorded; perhaps the day was unsuitable, since a strong, cold north wind was blowing and the sky was almost overcast.

A further visit to examine the orchids was made on 1st August. By this time the plants had finished flowering. All had developed a hole in the soil surface but had not grown upwards at all. The perianths were withering and the bracts had mostly dried and turned brown. In most cases the ovaries were intact and appeared to be developing further. One plant however, had been stripped of its flowers while another had died and begun to disintegrate. Although

now open to the air the plants were no easier to locate than when covered with soil, since they blended with the leaf litter. Some sand had also lodged in the heads.

A further visit is to be made to collect mature seed.

Mr McGuinness has kindly offered to leave several acres uncleared and fenced when the paddock is prepared for cropping. This will preserve the orchid population for some years, thus permitting further studies to be made.

BARON SIR FERDINAND JAKOB HEINRICH von MUELLER 1825-96

T.G.Wilson

Mueller was born on 30th June 1825 in Schleswig-Holstein and after his parents died he was apprenticed to a chemist and graduated in pharmacy in 1846. Poor health forced him to find a warmer climate and he and his two sisters sailed for Australia on the advice of Dr J. Preiss who had just returned from Western Australia. He worked in Adelaide as a chemist but used his spare time investigating the local flora and contributing papers to societies in England and Germany besides the local Adelaide newspapers.

In 1852 Mueller went to Melbourne and the Lieutenant Governor La Trobe appointed him government botanist on the recommendation of Sir William Hooker in 1853. He made numerous expeditions and sent duplicate specimens to Hooker, "the plants being so much more useful in Kew than in Australia."

Mueller was appointed botanist to the North West Australia Expedition which left Sydney in 1885. They called at Moreton Bay before sailing to the mouth of the Victoria River. They explored much country on their journey overland to Moreton Bay, travelling 5000 miles in sixteen months. Mueller observed nearly 2000 species of which some 800 were new to Australian botany.

In 1857 after his return to Melbourne he was appointed director of the Botanical Gardens while still retaining his position as government botanist. He arranged the construction of an herbarium to which he contributed his own collection.

Mueller took a scientific interest in the Victorian forests and was adverse to the indiscriminate clearing and advocated the establishment of local forest boards to provide timber for the future. He also recognized the value of the eucalypt and encouraged Joseph Bosisto in 1853 to distil eucalypt oil on a commercial basis.

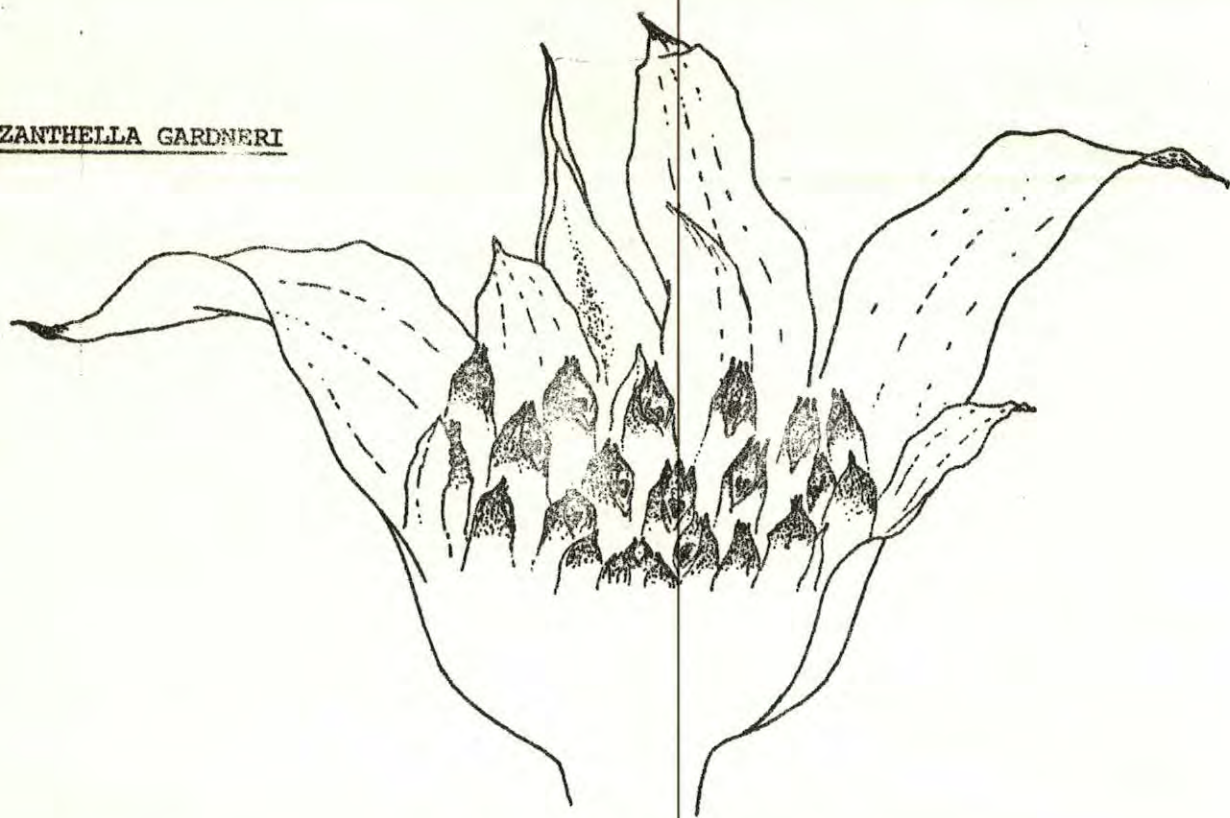
Mueller was untiring in his work, his correspondence some times reached 3000 letters a year and he published over 800 papers and major works on Australian botany.

In 1873 Mueller was replaced as director of the Botanical Gardens after prolonged criticism of his policies in connection with the gardens. His detractors wished among other things to see statues and works of art erected. Notwithstanding his statements on the objects of a botanic garden he was dismissed. Mueller remained government botanist but felt bitter over his dismissal and is said never to have entered the gardens again.

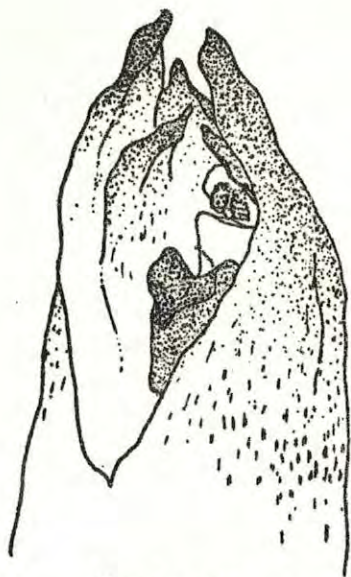
Mueller never married and devoted his life to his work and died in Melbourne on 10th October 1896.

'Australian Dictionary of Biography'

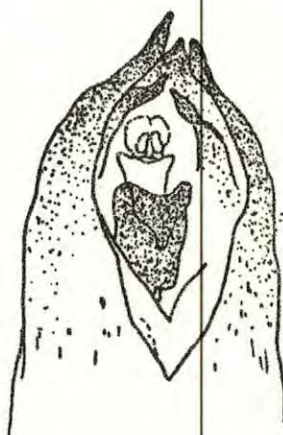
RHIZANTHELLA GARDNERI



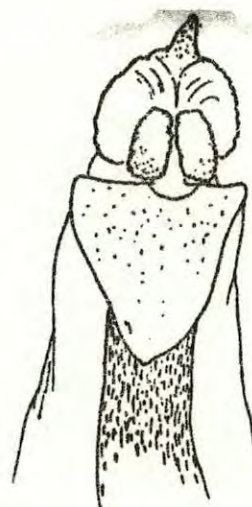
Half flower x 2.3



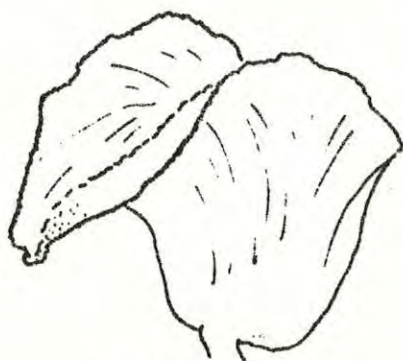
Single flower
x 16



Single flower
x 12



Head of column
x 23



Labellum x 20



Pollinia x 15

Rear view



Front view

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