

W.A. NATIVE ORCHID STUDY

AUGUST 1975.

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CONSERVATION GROUP.PRESIDENT. H.E. FOOTE,VICE PRESIDENT. A. BROWN,SECRETARY. L. SHEPPARD,TOPIC.

The topic talk was given by Alex George the Dept. of Agriculture Herbarian on *Rhizothella gardneri* (the underground orchid), *Prusopyllium* (leek orchids) and *Corybas* (helmer orchid) and was as usual supported by some very good slides, one in particular of the underground orchid. This slide would be a treasured possession as we had some idea of how it looked but have never seen it. This orchid never breaks the surface. Therefore very rarely seen.

FIELD DAY.

The field day was schedule to comb the Jurien Bay area and seven cars participated in this trip and it proved a good day. The first stop revealed the much sort after *Phelymetra variegata*, but disappointed the camera people as being on the cold side was not fully open.

Moving on there was a little discomfort as members ran into a patch of approximately 15 kilometers of mud slush, which by looking at the cars there would be enough mud on them to top dress the front lawns.

Jurien Bay area was disappointing at first, but as we moved nearer the coast and in mainly Wandoo country many genera were found and the cameras were working overtime, so we hope to see some fine slides in the near future. *Pterostylus Scaba* var *Scaba* was flowering in large colonies. *Pterostylus nana* only small colonies. This area is marked down for another visit later in the flowering season as most plants were small and also only a small area was covered.

POINTS OF INTEREST.

We received six copies of the Victorian Branch of the Australasian Native Orchid Society. These will be perused and any articles of value will be printed into this newsletter, then passed over to the Librarian.

Volunteers are required to set up a Native Orchid display at the Royal Show, details will be supplied later.

Native Orchids are required to send to the Sydney Orchid conference. So keep in mind any good stands which are easily obtained as these will have to be picked fresh.

August 3rd. is the next field day to Mogumber & Dandarragan. Depart Centre Point, Midland, 9am.

We received the South Australian Orchid Bulletin through the efforts of Mr. Roy Hargreaves and we take the liberty of reprinting a very good article by Mr. Les. Nesbitt.

Of the 115 or so species of orchids recorded in this state only about 45 are found in collections in Adelaide. A few will not grow if removed from their natural habitat, but most remaining 70 species are very rare and some may be extinct. These rare species probably require a specialised soil, terrain climate etc., for growth and therefore we could expect them to be very hard to cultivate. These if ever found in flower should be hand pollinated and left where they are. They may have some hope of survival in the future.

I like to divide the species in cultivation into two groups which I call COLONIAL TYPES and SEEDLING TYPES.

### COLONY TYPES.

Colony types multiply vegetatively either by forming several plants per tuber or more commonly by each plant producing several tubers. This group is generally easy to grow and most species flower freely.

I repot colony types during the dormant period at one or two year intervals most of them prefer sandy conditions and like a soil rich in leaf mould or peatmoss. I re-use my old *Cymbidium* compost in the soil mix for these 20-30% peatmoss in sandy hills soil give good results under shadecloth.

Weak foliar feeding during the early months of growth is beneficial and results in larger plants and taller flower stems.

### SEEDLING TYPES.

The seedling types seldom multiply vegetatively in fact some never seem to, so they must be propagated from seed. Nearly all our highly coloured and attractive orchids are seedling types.

I have found that about 10% of my seedling types die out each year during the dormant period, so it is most important to raise new seedlings to ensure a continuity of plants and hence flowers. I think that this is the main reason why our native orchids are considered hard to grow, since any one plant will last only about five years on average cultivation. The same dying out tendency occurs in the bush but natural pollination ensures that the species survive. It is quite easy to hand pollinate the flowers and the seeds has only to be scattered on the surface of the soil around the base of the plant. This method is rather hit or miss, but it is easy and often gives good results especially if you sow a number of pots.

Some seedling types resent being repotted especially *Caladenia* species unless seedlings become over crowded. There is no need to repot more often than every five to ten years. This means some care should be taken with soil preparation. Pots which will last at least five years must be used. Black plastic and clay pots are suitable. Seedling-types generally prefer sandy well drained soil and light shade. Most of them flower in the spring and pots have to be hand watered at this time because they dry out more readily than the natural soils in the hills. A little peat-moss in the soil mix helps to retain moisture, 10% peatmoss is what I use. Too much peatmoss will result in plants rotting in mid winter from soil which is too wet. I add about 10-20% sand to the basic hills soil to improve drainage.

This is not the complete extract as specie names have been omitted, but it gives culture methods by Mr. Les Nesbitt of South Australia.