

&

CONSERVATION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 1975

PRESIDENT H.E. FOOTE,

VICE PRESIDENT A. BROWN,

SECRETARY L. SHEPPARD,

TOPIC

Mr. Andrew Brown gave the topic talk of August on Caladenia (spider orchid). This was very well supported with excellent slides, but, if the guest speaker of the night could hand down some important notes on the subject it could be printed into these pages, so that it could be used for future references and members would be able to refer back for any unusual characteristics in certain plants.

FIELD DAY

Sorry no report, and we would like to know the happenings of the day, good fortune, misfortune or good findings.

POINTS OF INTEREST

The Royal Agriculture Show is scheduled to open on the 19th of September and the Group has a display area in the Horticulture Hall, members are reminded that this has to be set up by Thursday night the 18th. We require volunteers to help set up and then to man the display during the show to look after and talk to people who are interested. Passes will be available from the President.

Sydney orchid conference : flowers are also required to send to Sydney. They are to be airfreighted out on Saturday 13th. September and should be picked as late as possible. Delivery centres and packing centres will be announced at the September meeting.

The visit to the State Herbarium was very successful and members who had the opportunity to visit this place were astounded at the work and realised what a mammoth task is before these people in endeavouring to tabulate the wildflowers etc. of this state as even now, new genera are being found and these have to be classified and named. It is thought that the group in liason with the Herbarian may help in many ways, as there seems to be some orchids still to be named.

The group has decided to start a pressed collection and at present the Librarian Mr. Reg Lander has the job of looking after these delicate things. Miss Margaret Groves, who has a fine collection of her own, has indicated that after her exams is willing to do this job, this will ease the pressure off the Librarian.

Mr. Lal. Sheppard made the trip to Albany to check and investigate the area at Baker's Junction and according to maps of the area and also viewing the tract of land, found that it is forestry and that the orchids which abounds there are secure. Another reserve was located north east of this area, which is gazetted as a flora reserve and on a stroll through this 473 acres found many species, he intends to revisit this reserve later in the flowering season to record the species. Further east in the Granite Hill area is another approx. 2,000 acres of Flora and Fauna reserve which also takes in the Kalgan River, which is renowned for it's varieties of orchids found.

The slide library is short of certain genus and the librarian has listed the following : Calochilus, Corybas, Cryptostylus, Diuris, Lycopanthus, Leporella, Prasopphyllum, Acianthus, Speculeaea, Drakca, Epiblema, Microtis.

Since the starting of this Group we have gathered 65 members mainly from the metropolitan area who are interested in the wealth of our orchids. There are also country people interested in this move of conservation and study, but owing to distance and communications find it difficult to keep in contact with the main group. At the 1974 Royal Show the Group staged a display which attracted a large number of country people and from this display we received many requests to visit private properties, but this takes time. We have visited many properties and found that these farming people have set aside an area or areas in the hope of retaining the orchids which are there in their natural habitat.

For the 1975 Royal Show we are endeavouring to print a special newsletter showing addresses and names and the aims and the work of the Group in the hope that interested persons will join our ranks or even pass on information about their districts.

Western Australia is a great expanse of land and without the help of these people living in the country it will take years to cover and identify the species, which abounds in our State. In the past we have gone into areas with very little knowledge of the districts and searched then reported on the species, flowering time, and most of all the security of these orchids, but then, do we know that they are secure? As progress is fast moving.

When legislation comes into force some time this year, bringing all Flora and Fauna under one department, we hope we can then set down a procedure to follow in the conservation of our valuable and unique orchids.

The following is an extract from the A.N.O.S. Victorian Branch written by Max Elliott on the Genus *Corybas*.

Of the Genus *Corybas*, only nine of approximately fifty known species are found in Australia. Commonly referred to as 'helmet orchids' these quaint little plants are exciting and generally easy to grow, but extremely difficult to flower in any profusion. As one writer has said, "to look down on these minute flowering plants, one feels like Gulliver perring down on lilliputian soldiers."

They are generally found in colonies, mainly in semi-shaded areas with a damp atmosphere, either under bracken or low growing shrubs, and in forest areas close to the leaf mould or mossy soils. All species have a solitary rounded leaf which lies flat on the ground. Their underground system consists of a small tuber, between $\frac{1}{2}$ " - $\frac{1}{4}$ " and long white roots which forms new tubers at their tip.

It is important that the tubers never dry out, and therefore with proper drainage, they will take copious quantities of water. I prefer terra-cotta pots of the squat variety with a mixture of one third coarse sand and two thirds of loam taken from under Coastal Tea Tree. No fertilizer is added or given to the plants except once a year, a handful cymbidium mixture is placed on top of the medium. The nutrient obtained through watering, washed down into the existing mixture to the tubers.

I have considered adding a small percentage of mountain soil to the other mixture mainly to prevent soil fluctuation. David Jones has had success with his *Corybas* since using mountain soil. As flowering of these plants is difficult it is important to take great care when in bud. Overhead watering should cease to prevent damping off. Also the plants should be sheltered against drying winds. They do not like sun at any time and badly burn if exposed at all. As the flowering life is very short it is wise to prevent fertilization of the flower through insects. Once fertilized the flower quickly withers and elongates high above the remaining flowering plants. This is nature's method of providing better dispersal of the seed. The genus *Acianthus* is similar in leaf to *Corybas*, so don't be surprised if unflowered plants that you have been successful in obtaining do not turn as helmet orchids.

It has been pleasing to see several of our members now growing these quaint orchids with excellent success at flowering them. Tubers are often available each year through our tuber bank so why not purchase a few and put your skill to growing them. Your success to flower them will be most rewarding.