

W.A. NATIVE ORCHID STUDY
AND
CONSERVATION GROUP (INC)

NOVEMBER

NEWSLETTER

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The topic talk for November was given by Mrs Faye Hoffman on the Sun orchid; *Thelymitra*, and we have pleasure in printing this talk:

"The name comes from the Greek - *thelys* - a woman and -*mitra*- a cap or hood and refers to the hooded column which can be said to look like a woman's head-dress.

"Plants in this genus are called by the common name of sun orchids due to the fact that they react strongly to sunlight. The flowers remain closed at night and in cool overcast weather. They will however, open under warm conditions such as inside a heated room or a closed car so it would appear that they react to warmth rather than light.

"The sepals and petals are similar in appearance and colour and the column has tufted appendages. The variations in the form of the column provide the chief distinguishing feature of the species. The sticky disc at the base of the column is common to all of this genus.

"The genus is found in New Zealand, New Caledonia and Java, as well as Australia. Australian species number more than 50, of which some 25 species are found in W.A.

"Some of the species are believed to be self-pollinating and Fitzgerald reported that where the anther rises above the stigma and the pollen masses crumble freely and fall on to the stigma, the flower is usually capable of self-fertilisation. Where the pollen masses are not easily broken up but come away whole at a touch, fertilisation needs the agency of an insect.

"All sun orchids have a singly leaf, usually sheathed around the stem, but these vary from long and thin, sometimes spiralled around the stem, to short and broad. All are smooth except *Thelymitra villosa* which has fine hairs along the veins.

"*T. antennifera* - (having antennae) - is a common and widespread species which favours damp areas but is in no way confined to these, being found in well drained sandy soils in some areas. Its strong lemon perfume give it the common name of Lemon-scented sun orchid but it is also known as the vanilla orchid - probably because of a fancied resemblance to the vanilla bean when in bud. *T. antennifera* flowers from August to October.

"*T. Canaliculata* - channelled - referring to the channelled markings on petals and sepals. This is a fairly rare species, though where it grows it grows in quite large numbers. It seems to prefer damp soils on swamp fringes and is rarely found far from water. It flowers from September to December and has no common name in W.A. to my knowledge.

"*T. campanulata* - bell-shaped - is relatively common on the sand-plains south of Dongara and extending southwards along the coastal plain. Similar in many respects to *canaliculata*, though the column is much more squat. The common name of shirt orchid does not appeal as much as the alternative Bell orchid. Flowering period September to October.

"*T. villosa* - hairy (referring to the leaves) The colouration varies somewhat in this species - the amount of "spotting" is variable and specimens are often found without spots at all. The flowers are large and particularly bright yellow in colour. The

colour is unspotted and the hair tufts are tinted with orange. The species is widespread throughout the S.W. but is not common. Flowering period August to October. Common name - Custard Orchid.

"*T. mucida* - a dainty plum coloured flower which is neither common nor widespread. The column is deeply cleft with a dark bloom on the surface, giving rise to the name of *mucida* which means mouldy. It is found mainly in wet swamp lands in the Albany area - (Gull Rock) and is endemic to this area. Common name - Plum orchid, flowering period - September to October.

"*T. fuscolutea* - brownish yellow. There are two varieties of this yellow and brown blotched orchid. The very darkly marked *T. fuscolutea* var *stellata* is uncommon except in the Darling Ranges. The paler *fuscolutea* var *fuscolutea* is more common and is found along the coastal plain and slightly inland throughout the South-West from September to December. The column on both varieties is similar, the hood being pale and the most striking feature is the long finger like appendages projecting from the hood. The common name is Leopard orchid.

"*T. psammophila* - (sand-loving) This dainty little yellow orchid was apparently common at one time on the sand plains east and north of the Stirling Ranges. With its short narrow leaf and brown reverse-side petals and sepals it can easily be mistaken for *antennifera* at first glance, but a closer look will reveal that the brown column ears of *antennifera* bear no resemblance to the pale tan flat-top of *psammophila*. The only known location - discovered in 1973 by Magda Wittiver (Kings Park) is in a rubbish dump just north of Borden. The common name is Sandplain sun and it flowers from late August to mid-October.

"*T. tigrina* (tiger-like markings) This slender, narrow-leaved orchid with small, yellow flowers, marked with brown dots is found mainly in the S.W. and flowers late - around October and November though it may be as late as December in the Albany region. The common name is tiger orchid.

"*T. cucullata* - hooded.: - found on the wet flats in the Albany district this small plant has whitish flowers with deep purplish-brown spots. The lateral lobes of the column are short and blunt. An unusual feature of this orchid is the drooping habit of the flowers after fertilisation, giving it a bell-like appearance. The rather unimaginative common name given to this dainty species is Swamp sun orchid and it flowers from November to early January.

"*T. macmillanii* - named for Thomas Macmillan who discovered it. A truly beautiful member of the genus, found in conjunction with *T. antennifera*, this apricot-coloured beauty flowers in September and October in such widely separated areas as Tambellup and Southern Cross. Its common name is the Salmon sun. Some have quite distinct lemon "horns" around the petals and sepals and the colour varies from pale apricot to almost red. It has a faint lemon perfume.

"*T. variegata* - variegated. Truly well named the Queen of Sheba this species with its narrow leaves spiralling around the stem is a rare sight on a sunny day when its bright petals and sepals fold back so far that they almost clasp the stem and the bright yellow ears of the column show their beauty. There would appear to be two varieties - an early variety flowering in June and July in the Jurien Bay area which has distinct spikes on the column ears and the more common, but later flowering variety which is widespread in September and October. The sepals and petals may show different shades of red or purple splashed with orange.

"*T. sargentii* - named after O.H. Sargent. This handsome species, although somewhat similar in appearance to *T. villosa*, varies from it in the form of the column lobes. The column of *Sargentii* carries spots while *villosa* does not. The species extends from

the sandplains north of the Murchison to the eastern wheatbelt and bears the common name of the Freckled sun. Although the flowering dates of October to November are given by Erickson it flowers near the Murchison in late August.

"T.crinata - crested or hairy - referring to the crested column. This widely distinguished blue sun orchid known as the Blue Lady flowers throughout the S.W. from September to December. A variety found on Mt Clarence is consistently much more delicate and shorter than the usual types.

"T.nuda - a very variable orchid in colouration - varying from white through pink and mauve to deep blue. The column is sturdy with a semi-circular yellow cap setting of the black and purple column. In a swamp at Walpole, almost every plant was some shade of pink and along the Muir Highway in 1975, every possible shade was found in plants thick and sturdy enough to be almost mistaken for lupins. There is no common name in W.A. for this orchid, though the name Scented Sun was given to it when it was thought that it was T.aristata which it resembles closely."

Here is a short report on the weekend trip to Walpole enjoyed by 17 adults and 6 children. The guide for this area was Terry Wilson and his daughter Annette, and apparently many orchids were found plus a few sightings of snakes and on one occasion a very near miss with a tiger snake. This must be expected in the swamp areas of the South.

Quite a few miles were travelled in car and on foot, but it was rewarding as some very good slides were the results.

A Barbecue was scheduled for 14th November to Boulder Rock. This was to search for the Elbow Orchid and a late flowering Caladenia, both these orchids were flowering. Andrew Brown had some flowers he had gathered in the Albany district and members sat down after dinner to photograph and talk about these beauties.

We have started a mailing list for this newsletter and any member who is interested in having it mailed should submit their name to the Secretary with an extra \$2.00 to cover mailing costs. This covers eleven copies per year.

We welcome five new members into our Group:

Mr Robin Neave
Master Paul Foley
Mrs Collett
Mr & Mrs Judd

The Secretary has a country address book and urges members to use this when visiting towns where country members reside. I am sure they would be pleased to meet you.

The December meeting is to be purely social with the men supplying the drinks and the women to bring a plate. Barbeque facilities will be available and all this is to occur at Mr Ray Brown's residence on the first Friday in December (3rd December, 1976) - Christmas meeting.

Mr Ray Brown has sets of prints of our Terrestrial Orchids and these are mounted on an information board. These can be made up as an album, and are selling at \$6 for a set of 13 or the plain information board can be purchased to insert your own information and prints.

May we, the Committee and members extend to our country and interstate members a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. (Our hint for this festive period is to drive carefully, because our aim is conservation)