



Australian Native Orchid Society - Macarthur Group

May 2014

Edited by Tony Asquith mail: aaasquith@bigpond.com. Phone 4625 9874



President: Mr. W. Southwell (Ph. 46818589)

Postal Address:- 43 Strickland Cres.,

Secretary: Mr. J. English (Ph. 86262934)

PARRAMATTA. 2150

Treasurer: Mrs. C. Asquith (Ph. 46259874)

Next Meeting: THURSDAY , 19th June, 2014

Life Member: Mr. J. Riley

Conservation Officer: R. Hanman

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Venue: BIRRAWA HALL

FITZPATRICK ROAD, Doors open 7.15pm, benching closes 7.45pm, meeting starts 8pm

Mt. ANNAN.

President's Message. Hi to all.

A big thankyou to Tony for giving a talk at short notice, well done Tony. Congratulations to Mary-Anne, for plant of the night and popular choice, two months in a row. Well Done!!

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the July Meeting on Thursday 17th. Elections will be held at this time.

The new raffle plants have arrived from Tinonee with some very good specimens among them. Sales table will be operating at the June meeting, at any other time – please ring Margaret if there is anything you require.

See you at the meeting!!! Wally

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GUEST SPEAKER....

Guest Speaker will be Dr. Zoe-Joy Newby who is a Scientific Officer in the Science and Conservation Section of the Royal Botanic Gardens.. The topic will be “Angus’s Onion Orchid : habitat, seed production and microbial relationships”.

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PLEASE NOTE THE AGM WILL BE HELD ON THURSDAY 17th JULY.

Please consider being involved with the group and nominate for the committee.

MEETING HELD 15TH May, 2014.

Meeting Opened: About 8pm, and the President Wal welcomed members.

1. **Apologies:** Chris Munson, Peter Dowling, Ian Lawson.
2. **Minutes from Previous Meeting:**

Proposed by: Graeme Morrison **Seconded by:** Terry Cooke

3. **Business Arising from the Minutes:** Nil
4. **Treasurer’s Report:**

Proposed by: Carol Asquith **Seconded by:** Ross Morrison

Inward & Outwards Correspondence: Various Newsletters, sent & received.

General Business:

Tony received the WA Terrestrials new named Varieties

Tony gave a riveting presentation of orchid growing!!!!

Raffle : Phil, Peter Wise, Graeme Mary-Anne and Margaret.... And the meeting closed.. about 9.30pm

(Gerry Walsh – The Rock Lily Man) has kindly given permission for the use of the following article from his website www.therocklilyman.com . Many of us will have already visited his website and viewed his catalogue, gallery, culture notes and, of course, his bush trip stories).

Sarcochilus dilatatus

by Gerry Walsh (The Rock Lily Man)

Sarcochilus dilatatus is something of a mystery species to most native orchid growers. Everyone knows what it looks like and they can tell you how it influences the hybrids in which it is a parent. But not a whole lot of growers have seen *S. dilatatus* in the wild and even less have much idea about the conditions it likes to hang out in. Most will also support the notion that *S. dilatatus* is difficult to grow in captivity. There isn't a whole lot of specimens to be found around the bush houses in the village of Sydney, or in any other village really.

These hazy ideas, held by the majority of growers, are quite natural and it is easy to understand just how the vagueness that surrounds *S. dilatatus* has evolved.

The first plants of *S. dilatatus* that I ever seen were seedlings which were distributed from flasks at a meeting of ANOS Sydney Group some time in 1983. I obtained four of these and promptly killed them before ever seeing any flowers. The next plants I experienced were shown to me in September 1987 by the late Ralph Crane, from Brisbane, and were growing in the Brisbane Forest State Park. I'll never forget the elation of that first glimpse of these wild growing plants. And I quickly understood just how I'd murdered those precious seedlings back in '83.

As is often the case, seeing those first wild plants of *S. dilatatus* gave me all the understanding I needed to successfully grow this small Sarcanthinae species. Little did I realise that *S. dilatatus* would prefer to grow on the thin twigs of shrubs in a small, dry, Lantana-choked gully, much more than on the thick moss-encrusted slab of hardwood where I had sentenced those seedlings to a slow death. There can be no disputing the value of studying the habitats of the various native orchid species we come across. Far too many growers go all dribbly at the mouth at the sight of a nice orchid growing in a tree, but fail to observe where the tree itself is growing.

I tend to think of *S. dilatatus* as a sort of northern form of *S. australis*. They both grow in almost identical situations with regards to position on the host, air movement, moisture and light. They even have a floral shape vaguely similar i.e. long and narrow with club like ends to the segments. It is quite possible that these two species have a common ancestry.

S. dilatatus is very uncommon in NSW. I have never seen a plant growing in situ in the wilds of my own state. It certainly exists sparingly in dry scrubs away from the coast and to the west of about Grafton. I have no real knowledge of it occurring elsewhere in NSW. North of the border, *S. dilatatus* begins to appear with regularity. As mentioned above, the preferred habitat appears to be dry, scrubby rainforest and creek beds, noticeably at low to moderate altitudes and at some distance from the coast. By far the greatest number of plants I know of occur in plantation hoop pines in the Sunshine Coast and Noosa Hinterland. It frequently colonises the lower limbs of the older plantings . . . as do a host of other native orchids.

I first observed this feature of plantation hoop pines back in November 1989. On a subsequent visit to these areas in January 1993 I set out to check out as much of this man made habitat as I could in one day. I finished the day having logged in 600 kms and with the view that *S. dilatatus* is benefiting greatly from the activities of the forest industry in southern Queensland. I could never forget the sight of a dozen or so of the hugest specimen plants of this species that I have ever come across, sitting smugly about four metres above my head. Several of these were hanging off dead limbs. One in particular supported seventeen leaves and over fifty old racemes. As well, there were eleven new racemes nearly ready to burst into bloom. The plant was on its last legs when collected and unfortunately it never recovered. I kept the dead trophy for years to show all the sceptics just how huge *S. dilatatus* can get.

I was shocked when visiting the same locale in January 1995, to find about twenty hectares of ploughed up clay and not a stick of shade for hundreds of metres around. It resembled a bombing range. I agree with

the need for a forest industry based on plantations but I don't know how to deal with the idea of letting thousands of orchids perish in the rubble piles after the inevitable harvesting takes place.

It makes sense that any plants growing in such forest coups should be rescued before they are killed . . . regardless of how rare or how common a species they are.

A discussion on *S. dilatatus* could not be concluded without mentioning the form that occurs up near Gladstone and at points further inland and up into the Calliope Range. This form of the species first came to my attention when I journeyed up there in September 1992. We found this little Sarc that had just finished flowering by a matter of days. For the life of us, we could not decide what species it was. What would be flowering in the middle of winter? The southern Queensland form of *S. dilatatus* blooms from November through to January i.e. summer. So although these new plants looked like *S. dilatatus*, we discounted the idea because of this six month discrepancy in the flowering time. After all, it is only four hours car drive to the north of the type range.

Of course, it is now well known that this ponderous species is indeed *S. dilatatus*, but with a very different habit and appearance. The flowers are much dumpier or stout, being only about one cm high compared to southern flowers which can reach 2.5 cms deep. The colour is the other outstanding feature of these Gladstone plants. The club-like ends of the segments are strongly cerise/ochre brown in nearly all the specimens I've seen in flower, while the southern colour varies from yellow through to coffee brown and as dark as treacle brown. A large specimen in full bloom is absolutely stunning. *S. dilatatus* can get up to a dozen buds on each raceme. But this doesn't mean that there will be a dozen open flowers at any given time. It is the habit of *S. dilatatus* to open progressively, but certainly not regularly. While two flowers may be open today, these might wilt away after a few days. It could be up to ten days or so before the next one or two buds open. This irregularity means that a specimen plant can have flowers on board for a long period of time. If the weather is not too hot or changeable, each flower can last up to two weeks.

For its size *S. dilatatus* usually has an above average number of racemes. A plant with only 3 leaves often has two or three racemes. All this irregularity means that hybrids made with *S. dilatatus* usually have the same unpredictable flowering habit and blooms can open up over an extended period compared to other Sarcanthinae hybrids.

If you want to grow *S. dilatatus* successfully you must consider where it grows in nature and transfer that knowledge across to the bush house. The big choice you must make is what host to tie your plants on to. My favourite host at the moment is two cm thick branches, about forty cms long, of that very common *Leptospermum* species that has to be nearly the most common tree on the dry ridge tops of the Hawkesbury Sandstone regions. As you can probably gather, I don't remember what species it is. But it's the one with the wide and thin flaky bark that peels away in masses when pulled even slightly. This bark is usually a grey colour with just a hint of purple. Do you know the one I mean?

The roots get under this bark and it is very hard to overwater them. This saves many a plant of *S. dilatatus* and the other quick-die species such as *S. australis*. In fact I've got several specimens of *S. australis* still growing happily on this *Leptospermum* host after more than five years. I attribute this success solely to the dryness that the roots find under the copious layers of this ti-tree bark. You virtually can't wet them unless you set out to do so. Of course it helps to hang them up in some corner where you don't water them anyway. *S. dilatatus* is one of those species best hung up and forgotten.

Speaking of roots, those of *S. dilatatus* are perhaps the most active of all the Sarcophilus species. They are constantly growing - I doubt there is a time in the year when they don't have long green tips probing their way along through the fissures and layers of bark. I've seen wild plants of fairly small size with just a few roots but a couple of them can be pushing a metre in length without any doubt. Wild plants often carry a great number of seed pods. More than once I've observed plants with 6 or 8 pods from last season still not split despite this year's blooms just opening. To me these pods are just as interesting as the flowers themselves. They represent vigour and fertility that is often absent from some other species of native orchids. For the novice grower, specimen plants of *S. dilatatus* are just not available. Hopefully it will be available more frequently in flasks in the future. It sure deserves to be.

Gerry Walsh

(Have a look at his website shown above...it's really a well developed site!!!)

Benching Results MAY Meeting 15/5/2014.

Dendrobium Species	Den. bigibbum	M.A. Warner
	Den. prenticeii	C. Long
Dendrobium Hybrid	D. Topaz Dream 'Ben'	M. Warner
	Den. Berger	J. English
Sarcanthinae Species	nil	
Sarcanthinae Hybrid	nil	
Bulbophyllum	B. Schillerianum (Note: Not really in Flower)	R. Morrison
Aust. Species Other	D. bowmanii	R. Morrison
Aust. Hybrid Other	nil	
Terrestrial Pterostylis	Pt. Concinna	T. Cooke
	Dip. Grandiflorum	R. Hanman
Caladenia Species	nil	
Terrestrial Evergreen	nil	
Diuris Species	nil	
Terrestrial Hybrid	Ptd. X conoglossa	J. English
Terrestrial Other	Aci fornicates	J. English
	Ceno wispida	T. Cooke
Australasian Species	Ptst tonvicaula	Terry Cooke
Australasian Hybrid	D. Bush 'Pansy'	J. English
Novelty Class (50% or more)	Den bigibbum' Artic suprise x RSL Pink'	D. Roberts
Seedling First Flowering	nil	
Growing Competition 1		R. Hanman
Growing Competition 2		A. & C. Asquith

Plant of the night is Dendrobium Topaz Dream 'Ben' grown by Mary-Anne Warner and the Popular Choice was also the same plant and grower, Mary-Anne. Congratulations

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An Extra look at Gerry's Website.... It's a well presented site with lots of info available as well as plants!!!!

Papillilabium beckleri

IF YOU want to see just how attractive some of our native orchid species can be, just take a long look at Papillilabium beckleri the next time you get the chance. Unfortunately for novices, this species doesn't have a common name. Also, while it is a common species in the wild, it is not often seen in captivity. Even at Spring Shows it's unusual to see more than three of four specimens benched at a time. It's only the small band of die-hard species growers in Sydney Group of ANOS that seem to have any plants at all. And this is despite P. beckleri being quite common in areas to the north, south and west of Sydney - literally sitting right on our doorstep.

P. beckleri is a small member of the Sarcanthinae sub-tribe and looks for all the world like a juvenile plant of Plectorrhiza tridentata to the uninitiated. For this reason, many people may have been staring P. beckleri right in the face for years without realising it. They both grow in typical Sarcanthinae style i.e. in the twigs of trees near or over-hanging water courses. However, P. beckleri tends to have red/purplish pigments in its leaves whereas Plectorrhiza leaves are generally ordinary green. But this observation cannot be taken as gospel. To the experienced observer the two can be separated rather easily. The main points to look for are the much thinner old racemes on P. beckleri and its much narrower leaves. The leaves nearly always project

well forward of the crown, whereas *P. tridentata* leaves are wider, project at nearly 180 degrees from its crown and inter-leaf spacing is quite wide (up to 1 cm), whereas *P. beckleri* has no obvious inter-leaf spacing at all.

P. beckleri rarely has more than five leaves and these reach a maximum length of around 65 mms. The vast majority of plants would be far smaller however and commonly have only 2 or 3 leaves. The stems are rarely longer than 50 mms in *P. beckleri* but *P. tridentata* frequently has stems up to 400 mms or more long.

The racemes of *P. beckleri* are up to 75 mms long and support up to a dozen flowers arranged spirally around the rhachis . . . which adds considerably to the charm of the species. The flowers are 7 to 8 mms deep and generally a light creamy green in colour with a splash of vivid red/purple on the column and anther. But the most startling aspect of the flowers has to be the perfume; spicy sweet and extremely potent for its size. In fact, it is potent enough to take your breath away if sampled in a confined area on a hot day.

P. beckleri is distributed from the extreme northern parts of the Illawarra in the south, all the way up to south eastern Queensland where I have seen it growing in the Brisbane Forest Park and in plantation hoop pines near Kenilworth. It can be found from near sea level (in the south) up to about 800 metres above sea level (mid north coast). It tends to avoid the higher areas where most other temperate Sarcanthinae species would be quite happy to colonise.

P. beckleri is a colony forming species that reaches its greatest diversity in smallish shrubs, such as water gums and lily pillys, along watercourses. It occasionally occurs away from creeks however. The biggest plants I've seen grow on the lower branches of old Black Wattles to the south of Sydney. These trees are a hundred or more metres into open forest and away from the creek. Hopefully this extensive colony of super plants escaped the January bush fires that cut a swathe through the region.

P. beckleri is easy to grow so long as root production is the yardstick you use to measure your success. The roots are fast growing and seem to readily attach themselves to any host material. Bamboo sticks are a great host but so is cork and hardwood strips. Long and skinny is the way to go. Moisture retentive materials need not be added as the roots tend to avoid moss and spongy surfaces.

However, *P. beckleri* still has a reputation as a hard to grow species - and with good reason. Seemingly healthy specimens frequently develop a rot in the crown and die within a matter of days. By the time the rot is noticed it's simply too late to treat the problem. This is quite likely a fungal problem, although a bacterial culprit may be at work. The speed at which an infected specimen collapses is staggering. Several other Sarcanthinae species are susceptible to the same condition e.g. *Sarcochilus australis*, *S. dilatatus*, *S. hillii* and *Schistotylus purpuratus*.

Prevention is better than cure in all these cases and this is where diligent cultural practice looms high on a good orchid growers agenda. I also try to keep it high on my agenda. Good culture in this instance means rigid adherence to the old doctrines of high air movement combined with controlling the application of water. Too much is dangerous and is just not necessary. *P. beckleri* is well able to tolerate reasonably dry conditions. And if the truth be known, the driest of bush houses is probably far damper than the natural habitat in which many of the smaller Sarc. dwell for extended periods of the year anyway.

For anybody desiring to try their hand at growing this little gem, the prospect is not all that encouraging. I cannot recall ever having seen it on the list of orchids available from any nursery at all. And I've never seen it in flask either. As well, there has never been a hybrid registered with *P. beckleri* as a parent. But in the years ahead I feel it will turn up as a parent as hybridists explore and strive to extend the horizons of colours with Sarc. hybrids.

This last bit of journalistic bulldust reminds me that I haven't said a word at all regards the feeding *P. beckleri*. Like most small Sarcanthinae species, *P. beckleri* is not a gross feeder. My experiences suggest that it will exist well on small, irregular applications of fertiliser, as all of my plants have to anyway. Controlling the dreaded crown rot should be the only difficulty intending growers of *P. beckleri* encounter. But first you will need to get yourself a plant, and that's where your trouble will no doubt start. Don't give up though, you should be able to locate a specimen if you try.

Good Growing!!!!

From Sutherland's Orchid Society Website...

Dendrobium Speciosum Var. Speciosum 'National White' HCC/AOC-NSW

Not just a rock lily but a diamond (lily)!

National White is my favourite native orchid and possibly my favourite orchid overall. Very few people fail to be impressed by the sight of it. For me it was love at first sight.

It was introduced to the orchid growing fraternity by Col Brandon who achieved one of the earliest quality awards with it when it gained HCC number 297 from the AOC in September 1979. The virtues of National White that were acknowledged by the judges on this occasion were -

- Pristine white flowers offset by the dark purple markings on the labellum
- The upright racemes with all flowers well above the leaves, no need for stakes with this one!
- The very generous flower count that is naturally arranged to form a perfect 'foxtail' display
- Excellently formed flowers that put their arms (petals) and legs (sepals) in the air to present a flat face to the onlooker.

Overall the impression is one of a snow white orchid that has well and truly got its showbench act together. It was further honoured at the Australasian Native Orchid Conference in Wollongong where it was awarded section champion.

As a parent National White has produced many outstanding hybrids such as Den. Karloo (with Gracious Falcon), Den. Lynette Banks (with Eureka), Den. Graham Hewitt (with Ellen) and Den. Hilda Poxon (with tetragonum var. giganteum). As a grandparent it has been involved in the highly awarded Den. Karsun and Den. Kayla hybrids.

National White's hybrids invariably inherit its spike habit, high flower count, flower form and modest growth dimensions. A notable trait in these offspring is that National White tends to mask the colour contribution of the other parent. A sure fire way to produce cleanskin or lightly spotted Hilda Poxons is to use it as a parent. Several attempts to produce red Den. Delicatums using National White (seeing that white speciosums are rather rare then surely the white would be recessive) have failed to produce the desired result regardless of how dark the Den. kingianum was. The other notable reproductive feature of National White is its reluctance to produce viable hybrid seed pods although attempts to breed it with other Den. speciosums have been more successful. The seedlings from such outcrosses are showing great promise with those to flower so far being of very high quality.

National white has small to average sized pseudobulbs with unique very broad, sometimes almost rounded leaves. It flowers reliably each season and will produce racemes from the secondary eyes under the leaves as readily as it does from the primary eyes. Occasionally it will produce so many racemes that the plant struggles to maintain the effort needed resulting in small, short-lived flowers. It prefers to be grown under shadier conditions than most other rock lilies, possibly because it lacks some pigment or because of its broad leaves. It is also quite intolerant of overfertilizing as several growers who were going to "put decent canes on it" have found out to their regret. Otherwise Dendrobium speciosum var. speciosum 'National White' HCC/AOC-NSW is a real gem which should be treated the same as any other rock lily.

Neville Roper
June 2003