

## **PREVIOUS MEETING – 6<sup>th</sup> July, 08**

**APOLOGIES:** Des & Jenny Scherwitz, Stan Winson, Valda Munro, Sheila Smith Marlene Peinke & Carol van Niekerk.

Tracy explained the various services the Society offers to members for the benefit of all our new members.

You are reminded of the following:-

- ❖ Should you like one of our experienced growers to visit you and give you advice on your growing area, shadehouse options or on your orchids, please contact Mike Bond.
- ❖ A water testing facility is available at meetings. Remember to bring samples of your water and also your fertilizer solutions for testing. Please see Mike Bond in this regard. Tracy will discuss the importance of water quality at our September meeting.
- ❖ We are constantly striving to improve and the committee will welcome any comments/suggestions you might have.

Tracy then gave a presentation on the Society's weekend outing to Maclear held earlier this year.

Finding orchids in this mountainous terrain can be a bit 'bone rattling' and certainly makes for an adventure to remember.

We found a total of 24 species and were extremely fortunate to find a few rare species in flower, namely, *Disa thodei*, *Disa fragrans* and *Disperis concinna*. Finding three species of *Huttonaea*, which are endemic to the Drakensberg, was also a highlight.

I hope that all of you are inspired to join us on future society outings.

## **PLANT TABLE RESULTS:**

There was a wide variety of flowering plants on display this month.

### **Hybrids on display included:**

Fragrant *Oncidiums*, a new release *Dendrobium Merit Island*.

'Prada', unusual green and white *Vandas* and an interesting intergeneric hybrid *Arachnostylis Cha Cha Lou*.

There were also many beautiful *Cattleyas* as well as a number of *Cymbidiums*, being the start of their flowering season.

### **Species on display included:**

- ❖ *Laelia anceps* – an easy to grow species from Mexico. It grows best mounted.
- ❖ *Ludisia discolor* – commonly known as 'Jewel Orchids'. This species from southwest Asia is grown more for its beautiful velvet-like foliage than its flowers. It grows best in deep shade and likes to be constantly moist.
- ❖ *Cattleya trianae* – The national flower of Colombia. A vigorous growing, winter flowering species which is a must for any orchid collection. The long lasting blooms will brighten up your shadehouse in winter.
- ❖ *Oncidium cheiroporum* – a dwarf species from Colombia and Nicaragua. Flowers are fragrant and long lasting, up to 6 weeks. Ensure your growing medium is free draining, as roots must dry off quickly after watering.

*Mystacidium venosum* – see info in June newsletter.

*Bonatea speciosa* – see info in July newsletter.

## **Members' votes resulted in the following:**

Species:	1st	<i>Phalaenopsis/Doritis pulcherrima</i>	Robert & Tracy Moss
	2nd	<i>Dendrochilum javieri</i>	Robert & Tracy Moss
	3rd	<i>Laelia anceps</i> var. Hilli	Mike & Yvonne Bond
Hybrids:	1st	<i>Paphiopedilum World Wonder</i>	Freda Steel
	2nd	<i>Beallara Marfitch</i> 'Howard's Dream'	Mavis Downey
	3rd	<i>Paphiopedilum sukhakulii</i> x <i>Paphiopedilum Clarissa</i>	Robert & Tracy Moss
Cattleyas:	1st	<i>Lc Melody Fair</i> 'Xue Yu'	Mike & Yvonne Bond
	2nd	<i>Blc Hwa Yuan</i> 'Gold'	Gordon Sonemann
	3rd	<i>Bc Maikai</i>	Dot Norval
Cymbidiums	1st	<i>Music Box Dancer</i>	Ray & Cynthia Hewson
	2nd	<i>Claude Pepper</i> 'Roroa' 4N x Red Beauty	Robert & Tracy Moss
	3rd	<i>One Tree Hill</i> 'John's Quest'	Ray & Cynthia Hewson

Thank you to members for bringing their flowering plants to share with us.

## **RAFFLES:**

The *Vanda Dr Anek* 'Bai' in flower was won by Baby Victor. The second raffle consisting of a *Cattleya* species Duo: *labiata* and *gaskelliana alba* was won by Gordon Sonemann. Congratulations to the winners and good luck with your plants.

We are hoping to raffle an orchid in flower or spike at the next meeting for the benefit of all the visitors. We will also raffle another *Cattleya* species Duo: *mendelii* and *warneri*. All tickets will be R10.00 each.

## **GONUBIE GOSSIP:**

### **NEW MEMBER:**

We extend a warm welcome to Karen Koekemoer who has joined us this month. We hope you enjoy many happy years of orchid growing with us.

### **SHOP NEWS:**

The Shop and Library operate from the premises of Pioneer Nursery and the Open Times for August are:

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 15h00 - 16h00

Monday 18th August 15h00 - 16h00

## **NEW IN STOCK**

### **Coco peat – at an Introductory Price of R50.00 per block.**

For many years bark has been the basis of most potting mediums. Bark was considered reliable, cost effective and convenient. However recently some argue that bark has become less attractive because:

- ❖ The quality of the bark nuggets is diminishing.
- ❖ Wood chips and other inclusions are on the increase.

- ❖ The cost of bark is increasing.
- ❖ When decomposing, the bark draws down on nitrogen (this can be partially corrected with the use of a fertilizer regime). After a year or so the decomposing bark becomes acid and appears to retard growth of the plant.

A number of growers and orchid nurseries are now using Coco peat.

Coco peat is sourced primarily from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia and is a by-product of the coconut fibre production process. The residue of the process is sun-dried, graded according to size and proposed use and is then compressed into blocks.

Coco peat mixes well with other mediums such as perlite and diatomite and comes in a variety of sizes to suit most orchid genera.

In summary some advantages of Coco Peat are:

- ❖ It is long lasting (said to be up to 5 years).
- ❖ It is cost effective
- ❖ Coco peat has high water holding capacity, between 30-60% with slow release of moisture.
- ❖ It has good drainage with air filled porosity between 35-55%.
- ❖ Coco peat is easy to wet.
- ❖ It does not contain inclusions such as weed seeds.
- ❖ It has an ideal natural pH of between 5.8 and 6.4
- ❖ Coco peat is easy to handle (a block of coco peat and 30 litres of water in a 60 litre garbage bin makes 50 to 60 litres of potting medium in about 30 minutes).
- ❖ There is a low risk of nuisance dust as it is compressed and hydrated with water.
- ❖ Coco peat is recyclable.

The use of coco peat appears to promote strong plants with healthy root growth. The roots are thicker with vigorous white growing tips. With bark on the other hand the roots are brown and do not appear to have the same vigour.

The same general watering and fertilizing regimes can be used for bark and coco peat. The watering regime should be modified according to the particle size and content of the mix being used.

When potting with coco peat it should not be compressed around the roots of the plant. Rather it should simply be placed around the roots.

Before changing over to coco peat it is recommended that trials should be carried out. Several growers have experienced problems with the medium and claim that the coco peat used turned toxic and become water repellent. This could be a problem with the quality of the coco peat. Some coco peat may contain too much salt as a result of the harvesting process used. Before using coco peat it should be washed two or three times.

#### **Conclusion:**

Coco peat is not a magic ingredient. It does however appear to have many advantages over bark. A number of growers claim that by using coco peat outstanding growth is achieved compared to the use of bark mixes.

#### **EPOS RECOMMENDED PRE-TREATMENT FOR COCO PEAT**

The untreated block swells to +/- 50 litres when hydrated, so use a container that will hold this volume. Fill the container with 25-30 litres of water and add:

- 2 Tbps Lime – this helps adjust pH
- 2 Tbps Calcium Nitrate – this neutralises salt in the media
- 2 tsps Epsom salts – Freshens mix and reduces salt in the media
- 5 ml Sporekill – reduces pathogen count in the media.

Place block into water and allow to soak for at least 2 days. Give it a stir every now and then and top up with water if necessary. Thereafter drain and then rinse very well with a jet of water from your hosepipe to wash out all the fines.

#### **PLEASE ALSO NOTE THAT THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE**

**TEMPORARILY OUT OF STOCK:** Orchid Mix, Polyfeed, Sphagnum Moss.

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS TO DIARISE**

7<sup>TH</sup> September - GOS meeting with an emphasis on Orchid Growing for Beginners.

20-28<sup>th</sup> September - GOS Show at Pioneer Nursery

Which includes:-

20<sup>th</sup> September - Potting Day – Get all the advice you need on repotting orchids.

27<sup>th</sup> September – A day full of talks / demos. Programme will be provided in next month's newsletter.

#### **GOS SHOW**

We need everyone's help to ensure the show is a success. Help is needed to set up the display as well as for the duration of the show. We need members to volunteer to assist with raffle sales, plant sales, shop sales, assisting public with Q & A's, potting day and serving tea to the Senior Citizens etc, etc.

A roster will be circulated at the next meeting and we request that you please fill in the days and times you will be available to assist us.

Also remember to give your plants a little extra TLC and try to persuade them to get their flowering time right! They are the stars of the show and we need every single one to ensure we put together an orchid spectacular, which will have the whole town talking!

#### **NEXT MEETING 10<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

12h45 –14h15 ***STRICTLY MEMBERS ONLY.***

Join us for a social luncheon of homemade Soups and Breads.

You will also have the unique opportunity to browse, mug in hand, at the many quality orchids, which will be on sale from Outeniqua Orchids.

Members are required to bring their own crockery/cutlery for the luncheon as well as any beverages you may want to enjoy with your meal.

There will be a plant table so please remember to bring your flowering plants.

The doors will be opened to the public/visitors at 14h15 for a presentation by Else Hall which will include some culture tips.

The plant sales area will be re-opened after Else's presentation.

Please encourage anyone you know who is interested in orchids, to attend this meeting.

## **GOS QUIZ:**

**JULY'S ANSWER:** There was no correct entry.

Schomburgkias. Some species of Schomburgkias have an unusual symbiotic relationship with colonies of ants that are usually found living in their large, hollowed out, banana-like pseudobulbs. An opening at the base of each pseudobulb serves as an entrance for the ants which harvest nectar from the flowers. The ants pack many pseudobulbs with debris that includes other dead ants, a variety of insects and pieces of plant material. Schomburgkia tibicinis directly utilises minerals of the organic debris deposited by the ants inside the hollow pseudobulbs. Since the open-canopied trees of the tropics can often be nutrient poor habitats, a small input of nutrients from insects can have a significant effect on plant survival and growth.

Schomburgkia tibicinis occurs in Honduras and was first discovered there by Mr. G. Ure Skinner. Skinner was attracted from a considerable distance to the masses of lofty spikes in full bloom. However, he was not permitted to obtain possession of this prize plant, as swarms of fiery ants, to which the hollow stems afford a snug retreat, issued forth in thousands to repel the spoiler and inflict pangs which none but the most ardent naturalist would have braved.

The term myrmecophily is applied to this ant-plant phenomenon and some taxonomists have renamed these schomburgkias to Myrmecophila, which literally means 'Ant Loving'.

## **AUGUST'S QUESTION:**

To participate simply write your name and answer on a piece of paper and pop it into the box provided at the door.

An orchid that lives perched on a rock is termed .....

- a) Geophyte
- b) Lithophyte
- c) Petrified

## **BEGINNER'S CORNER**

It's Cymbidium season and many new orchid growers start with Cymbidiums. Herewith a repeat on Cymbidium Spike Management for the benefit of all our new members.

As the flower spikes appear, they should be supported with suitable stakes. This enables the spikes to be trained and also protects them from being accidentally broken off.

Do not tie the spikes too firmly to the stake unless the plant is being transported, rather just enough to retain it in a satisfactory position, allowing normal growth to continue.

Any staking must allow natural spike form to develop, as this will produce the most attractive display. Flowering spikes seem to fit three categories: *straight*, *arching* or *pendulous*.

Let *pendulous* spikes do their own thing and allow them to cascade. Sometimes the emerging spike will decide to follow the surface of the medium or try to burrow into it and you will need to correct this. Place one end of a plastic label under the emerging spike and the other end on the rim of the pot. This creates an upward-sloping ramp that the flower spike will follow over the rim.

For *straight* spikes insert a stake away from the edge of the pot in a position where you can imagine the flowers will be seen to their best advantage. Start tying at the base of the spike using soft plastic coated wire and progress towards the top of the spike.

For *arching* spikes, insert the stake and tie only up to the start of the curvature or arch. Keep the tie at this point looser than usual to allow the spike to move around a little as it grows, otherwise the weight of the developing buds may cause the stem to kink at the position of the last tie and eventually to snap. With arching spikes it is necessary to let the spike develop its own strength, that is, to be largely self-supporting.

As the spikes grow, do not move the plant around any more than is necessary until the spike shape is set. If the plant is turned around in relation to the light sources, not only will the spike become twisted, but also the presentation of the individual flowers on the spike will be uneven.

Manipulation of spikes/buds should never be done in the morning as they tend to be brittle and snap easily. Spikes/buds are much more pliable later in the day and on warm days.

There is a close relationship between the amount of light received by a plant and the flower colour. Reds, pinks and yellows require bright light during the development of the buds for maximum colour. Once flowers are open they should be shaded to prevent fading. Whites, greens and pastels should be completely shaded during bud development for best results.

As spikes develop never peel the sheathing leaves away as the buds can be seriously damaged.

Watch out for aphids, which can damage buds and cause warts or spotting on flowers. Try to dislodge them with a jet of water or wipe them off manually. Avoid spraying with insecticides as they can blemish the blooms.

Overhead watering/misting while plants are in bud/flower is not recommended as water can rapidly disfigure blooms.

Ensure that all the flowers have opened fully before moving your plant from outside to indoors. Moving a plant in bud can result in the buds aborting i.e. turn yellow and drop off. This is due to the change in environment.