



Dear Member,

The following advertisement has been placed in the newsletters of the 40 New Zealand orchid societies:

We are able to offer up to 25 different New Zealand native orchids. Our list includes the blue Thelymitra and our endangered evergreen Cryptostylis subulata as well as our own Dendrobium and other beautiful hanging species.

Send stamped addressed envelope to:

House of Orchids,
145 Manuka Road,
Glenfield, Auckland 10.

This has obviously caused several comments, I for one am aghast, and even the N.Z. branch of the World Wildlife Fund and our Nature Conservation Council have become involved. I have first hand information of one Commercial orchid grower who bought 100 Thelymitra from the advertiser, for resale, together with several other species - including Bulbophyllum tuberculatum (which is hardly common!), so obviously these plants are being collected on a large scale. No-one has yet succeeded in growing our native orchids from seed, so those plants are obviously being collected in large numbers from the wild. I do not have accurate v/hya and wherefores of where they are being collected from, if from National Parks, Forest Parks or Crown Land, it is illegal, leaving only private farm land as the main source, - and as for endangered species - illegal from anywhere!

Incidentally, the advertising blurb doesn't even give cultural advice in at least an attempt to try and perpetuate these plants in cultivation. Presumably if people are keen enough after their first acquisitions die they will go back for more - all to the good of the advertiser's finances! To quote further:

Thelymitra - We believe every hobbyist should have a clump of these. (They can't identify the various blue species!)

Cryptostylis subulata - until recently this orchid was found in only one small location in New Zealand (it is now known from two!) and must still be regarded as being on our endangered list (no wonder!)

Earina autumnalis is the rarer of the two Earinas (not in Wellington)

Dendrobium cunninghamii - This orchid is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain (not surprising!)

Prices vary from \$4.50 to #14.00 for terrestrials, and from #9.50 to #26.50 (D. cunninghamii) for epiphytes!

There is no legal way of stopping people selling our native orchids if legally collected, but 2 main things worry me. Firstly several of us know that the vast majority of these plants sold will not survive in cultivation, and secondly, once these plants are offered for sale, other unscrupulous people are also going to jump on the band-wagon to make a quick dollar - or several dollars if the going prices are anything to judge by. It would be so easy to go into the hills anywhere and dig up plants for a quick sale.

Some members have already contacted me, but if anyone can come up with further suggestions, please let me know. I will include in this newsletter, a relevant article on the situation in Australia, which could obviously apply just as easily to New Zealand at some future date.

Dorothy Cooper,
14 Avalon Crescent,
Lower Hutt.



Remarkable Metamorphosis of Thelymitra pauciflora Cheesem. (not of R.Br.)

E.D.Hatch

The plant which we in New Zealand have, since Cheeseman's paper in Trans.N. Z. Inst. 4 8:1916, p.214, been accustomed to call Th. pauciflora; a 'plant with blue flowers, a deeply cleft, bright yellow mid-lobe to the column-wings and sparse white tufts (which do not overlap) of lateral cilia;' is actually an unstable epharmon of Th. longifolia Forst., and will, under suitable conditions, revert to the latter species.

At the beginning of 1982 I was asked to send tubers of the Auckland form of Th. pauciflora to Botany Division, Christchurch, for chromosome counting. Accordingly in April 1982 I brought in a clump of roadside plants, just beginning to show their leaves, planted them into a single 150mm clay pot, marked with an aluminium label stamped with the number 15, and wrote the details into my card system. There were no other Thelymitras in the coolhouse at that time, so that there was absolutely no possibility of a mix-up. In October 1982 these plants came into flower, typical (NZ) pauciflora, blue flowers, cleft yellow mid-lobe etc. I lifted two plants from the pot, and despatched them, tubers and flowers together, to Christchurch. I left the remaining 5 plants in the pot, still with their no.15 label. They died off for the summer and came up again in April 1983 with the same leaf form as before. They appeared to be thriving and in due season developed flower spikes, which opened on 15 October 1983 as normal Th. longifolia; white flowers, brown cucullate mid-lobe with truncate yellow tip and overlapping, dense white tufts of lateral cilia. The no.15 label still firmly in place.

My coolhouse is dug into a slope and below ground level at one end. It also has a built-in fish pond and waterfall which tend to make it damp and humid. The lighting is indirect and registers only 61% of the outside light value. I am inclined to credit (blame?) the reversion to these conditions, but whatever factors triggered off the change, the change..itself is beyond dispute.

It is fortunate for taxonomy, since we are dealing with the type of the genus, that the climax-form of the series is still Th. longifolia, Forst., a robust but not necessarily tall plant, with white flowers and the characteristic longifolia column, and a flat, deflexed, ribbed leaf up to 25mm wide by 360mm long. Small plants may be found in both forms, with narrow-erect sheathing leaves and sometimes only a single flower. The blue flowered pauciflora form does not (in Auckland) seem to develop beyond the semi-erect, sheathing leaf stage.

I would suggest deleting Th. pauciflora from the New Zealand orchid flora and amending the description of Th. longifolia to include the alternative column-form. The complex in the broad sense is notoriously variable in colour and minor form, and these variations have been discussed in detail by Dr.Moore in Flora N.Z. 2:1970,p,130.

This discovery drew my attention to 2 other Auckland species which are associated with the longifolia complex, T. intermedia and T. aemula. In colony of 10 flowering plants of Th. intermedia which I staked for reference, I lifted 2 of the plants, sent to Christchurch for chromosome counting and kept the other in cultivation. On 1 November 1983 the potted plant flowered as Th. aemula. I immediately rushed out to the coast to look at my marked colony.

Every flower on each of the 8 plants had the aemula column-structure, Vegetatively they hadn't changed at all. The earlier and valid name intermedia Bergg, 1878, belongs in this case to the unstable form, while the climax form, aemula Cheesem, 191, is the synonym. (See also Moore, Flora of N.Z. under T. intermedia- Ed)

I have no idea of the relationship between this 2-form group and the larger longifolia complex, if indeed they are related. It will be interesting to see if any other New Zealand species prove to be unstable.

It is possible that the extremely damp, warm and humid spring of 1983 had some bearing on the changes but this is mere supposition.

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