

Czechs sentenced for attempted smuggling of NZ orchids

Bec Stanley, DOC Auckland Conservancy

The Wildlife Enforcement Group (WEG) has successfully co-ordinated the prosecution of two Czech nationals in New Zealand's first documented case of native flora smuggling. WEG is an agency of representatives from Customs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Department of Conservation whose role is to investigate wildlife smuggling. Smuggling of orchids worldwide is thought to be on the rise.

Jindrich Smitak, an inspector in the Czech Government Environmental Protection Agency, and Cestmir Cihalik, a professor of cardiology from a leading Czech university, each pleaded guilty in February to one charge of trading in specimens of threatened species. They were both convicted and each fined \$7,500 plus costs. Smitak also admitted three charges of removing plants without authority from National Parks and was also convicted on those charges, but discharged without further penalty.

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between Governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. All New Zealand orchids are covered by Appendix II of this legislation. Appendix II species are not necessarily threatened with extinction but are those that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. International trade in specimens of Appendix II species may be authorized by the granting an export permit. Permits or certificates would only be granted if the relevant authorities are satisfied that certain conditions are met, e.g. that such export will not be detrimental to the survival of that species i.e. is NOT collected from the wild; (as was the case in this particular instance) or that the specimen was not obtained in contravention of the laws of that country, amongst other considerations. See <http://www.cites.org/> for more information.

Smitak and Chihalik were attempting to smuggle out of New Zealand more than 350 dried herbarium specimens of native orchids and other plant species taken from inside National Parks. They had 93 orchid specimens from 22 species (including *Microtis*, common *Pterostylis*, *Winika*, *Earina* species, *Ichthyostomum* (*Bulbophyllum*), *Simpliglottis* (*Chiloglottis*), *Gastrodia* and *Orthoceras*) from numerous sites around the country to export back to the Czech Republic. They both also had a number (12) of live epiphytic orchids in their possession that could be propagated and/or sold.

"If these or any live New Zealand orchids were successfully smuggled out of the country they would be highly sought-after," Colin Hitchcock of WEG says.

Despite media reports here and in the Czech Republic none of the orchids collected were on any NZ threatened plant list. The confusion seems to have arisen because all orchids are deemed to be threatened by trade under Appendix II of the CITES legislation.

The effects of this collection and attempted export are the perceived risks of New Zealand's native orchids entering the commercial realm overseas. This would increase

interest and may encourage trade - possibly increasing chances of collection from the wild to supply this trade.

The Wildlife Enforcement Group can be contacted by E-mail at weg@iconz.co.nz, or by writing to WEG C/- NZ Customs, Box 29, Auckland or by calling 09 3596607.

Meeting reports

Oregon, Europe & Dunedin: Plants, Gardens and Seeds. Meeting 16 June 2004
Tom Myers, Botanical Services Officer, Dunedin Botanic Garden

Reviewed by Peter Bannister

Tom took up his appointment at the Dunedin Botanic Garden in 1993, whilst still completing his MSc in marine botany at the University of Otago. Ten years later, he took a well-earned, unpaid, year off, happily leaving his ledgers and labels behind and looking forward to a bit of science and paid work in Oregon, USA. He took what he could (the dog, but not the horses) and accompanied his partner who was working on eel-grass (*Zostera*) in north-western USA. He visited lots of sandy and muddy beaches up and down the Oregon coast, and one was immediately struck by the similarity of beaches in Oregon and Otago. The exotic plants were around, broom on cliffs and marram grass on the dunes and the sea rocket (*Cakile edentula*), which occurs on New Zealand beaches (Volume IV of the Flora of New Zealand says it is from eastern North America!). There were also sea-lions and fossiliferous rocks on the shoreline cliffs, and a stuffed black and white loon of dubious provenance. There were pictures of blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium*) and insectivorous *Darlingtonia* preserved on boggy remnants, like ranks of helmeted soldiers. There was also skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanum*), which apparently does stink), a close relative of the arum lily. Its spathe heats up and attracts flies but also it helps the plant to melt an upward path through the spring snows, and other spring flowers like *Trillium* (I have some in my garden in Dunedin). Tom did some gardening and met *Equisetum arvense*, the horsetail, a terrible weed with wiry black rhizomes that are impossible to eradicate (I remember from my parents' garden in England). There were ventures in to the interior with painted hills and subalpine vegetation on Mt Hood (a volcanic sibling of Mt St Helens). Then across the Atlantic to Portugal. I can sympathise with Tom, it took me three days to pluck up courage to drive on the autostrada. He visited the botanic gardens at Coimbra and liked their informality, those at Bonn where access to the carnivorous plant and alpine glasshouses was apparently VERBOTEN (at least without prior arrangement), and was intrigued by botanic gardens that grew cultivated crops. Then up north to the Friesian island of Texel and its hardy (ready salted?) sheep that roam the dunes and salt marshes. (Some Texel sheep have been imported and bred in New Zealand - parts of them sometimes grace the shelves at New World). Then back to Oregon again to organic vineyards and the dangers of recycled water. It's good to see you back in Dunedin Tom: thanks for the talk!