

AN INTRODUCTION TO VICTORIAN ORCHIDS

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The Victorian orchid flora consists of some 172 species as compared with 72 orchid species in New Zealand. For the most part the Victorian orchids are small ground forms and do not include such magnificent species as Phaius tankervilleae or Calanthe triplicata found in the more northern parts of Australia. The outstanding Dendrobium speciosum is an exception that grows in parts of far eastern Victoria.

The ground orchids have a great deal of charm, they can be found in many areas sometimes most abundantly. Many of the generic names are familiar to New Zealanders; you would have no difficulty in finding species of Thelymitra, Caladenia, Microtis, Prasophyllum and Pterostylis.

Although Victoria has an extensive variety of flowering plants it was the delicate and fascinating orchids that took our fancy.

The date of our trip 1st to 22nd October 1978 proved to be a very satisfactory period for orchid flowering. We were fortunate in having with us on our tour Miss Mary Doery of Melbourne; the Tasmanian trippers will remember her. Not only was she a charming companion but she passed on to us some of her wide knowledge of Victorian plants. I am extremely grateful to her for identifying the orchids seen by us. Without her help identification of the orchids would have been extremely difficult or impossible.

Mr. A.C. Beauglehole, a very experienced botanist of Portland and Mr. Neil Bennett of Stawell led us on two occasions.

For the last part of our tour we joined the members of the Victorian Field Naturalist Club on their trip around the Little Desert National Park.

This article is being written with the idea of encouraging others to go hunting for orchids in Victoria by setting out some of the areas where orchids can be found and by giving a brief description of some of the species as an aid in identification. Those orchids marked * are illustrated on five separate sheets which the interested may obtain from the author. Mr. W.H. Nicholl's book contains numerous magnificent paintings of orchids and much information and has been most helpful.

We found it interesting that all the naturalists we met referred to the plants by their common names. The reason for this, we were assured, was because the common names had been fixed by long usage, naturalists knew which plant one was referring to, but botanical names were continually changing and keeping up to date with them was difficult.

Wilsons Promontory National Park lies at the southernmost part of the Australian mainland. Its present size is 48936 hectares, over 100 square miles. No fewer than 81 or 47% of Victorias 172 orchids have been recorded from the "Prom". In the three days we stayed in

the Park we could cover but a very small part of it. We did, however, manage to find 24 species of orchids. Here is a brief description of some of the common species seen.

In a damp grassy and scrubby area not far from the Rangers house we found :

- * 1: GREEN-COMB SPIDER-ORCHID: Caladenia dilatata
This is the best known spider orchid. We saw it in many places. Up to 30cm tall, with a hairy leaf, its petals and sepals are yellow green with a red stripe. The labellum, maroon, green and yellowish white, is tremulous. How lovely it is moving up and down in the wind. The lateral lobes of the labellum are green with deeply combed margins. Hence its name.
- * 2: HARE ORCHID: Caladenia menziesii
A slender orchid up to 20cm high with flowers mostly white to pink. Its petals are purplish red, narrow on their lower half but clavate above. They stand erect above the inflorescence like hares ears.
- * 3: COMMON BIRD-ORCHID: Chiloglottis gunnii
This orchid is very similar to the New Zealand species of Chiloglottis. The flowers are often dark purplish brown in colour. The ones we saw were green.
- * 4: DONKEY ORCHID or WALLFLOWER ORCHID: Diuris longifolia
Up to 30cm tall this orchid bears large yellow brown flowers the colours suffusing into each other as in wallflowers. The petals are elliptical or oval standing out like donkey's ears.
- * 5: WAX-LIP ORCHID: Glossodia major
A slender orchid, hairy, its flowers usually mauve but can vary from pink to white. Named because of its two white waxy patches on the labellum.

On the road bank a mile or so from the settlement we saw a splendid specimen of :

- * 6: TALL LEEK-ORCHID: Prasophyllum elatum
This is a robust orchid up to 80cm tall, the whole plant being yellow green or purplish black. Its stem has a diameter of some 2.5 cm and its labellum is upright. It is said to flower abundantly after a bush fire.

The heathland behind the incinerator plant and the path leading to Oberon Bay was rich in orchids. Here we found as well as Diuris, Prasophyllum and Caladenia,

- * 7: TALL GREENHOOD: Pterostylis longifolia
A tall slender orchid with lanceolate stem leaves very small at the base but increasing to 10 cm above the middle of the stem. It bears a number of green flowers in a raceme.

8: RED BEAKS: Lyperanthus nigricans

The broad ovate, flat, fleshy leaf, up to 9cm long, lying flat on the ground is easily distinguished. We saw an abundance of leaves but only one inflorescence. The stem was some 9 cm long bearing three large flowers showing crimson lines on a white ground with dark red tips. It requires a stimulant such as a fire to make it flower.

* 9: PLAIN-LIP SPIDER-ORCHID: Caladenia clavigera

The flowers are solitary yellowish with dark red markings. The sepals narrowed to a fine point, are usually clavate, and the dorsal sepal is upright.

The heathland visited near the Derby River rewarded us with many orchids in flower mostly species recorded above. Some new ones noticed were :

* 10: MAYFLY ORCHID: Acianthus caudatus

This small orchid is very slender, its ovate leaf is purplish below and its flowers are prune coloured. The narrow petals and sepals taper to a filiform point. The Mayfly orchid is usually found under trees or shrubs.

* 11: COMMON SPIDER-ORCHID: Caladenia patersonii

This is a variable hairy species with large flowers white to crimson or yellow with dark points. The petals and sepals taper to a fine point and the dorsal sepal is erect.

* 12: RABBIT-EARS: Thelymitra antennifera

The stem of this orchid is zig-zag, the flowers are pale to deep yellow and the sepals have an external brown stripe. The column is erect with broad wings produced into two erect dark brown appendages, hence its name.

* 13: TRIM GREENHOOD: Pterostylis concinna

This is a slender, small orchid, with green flowers with a dark green stripe and brown markings. The lip is erect, the lobes end in erect filiform points high above the galea.

* 14: MAROONHOOD: Pterostylis pedunculata

A very slender orchid. Its green flowers have brown maroon or reddish markings which are restricted to the forepart of the galea.

* 15: NODDING GREENHOOD: Pterostylis nutans

This orchid has about five broad leaves up to 9 cm long in a basal rosette. The whole flower is bent over facing the ground, most obviously nodding.

On the side of the Mt. Oberon tracks we saw a number of orchids including :

- * 16: DWARF GREENHOOD: Pterostylis nana

This is a diminutive species with a number of ovate leaves in a rosulate cluster. The flowers are light green with the lower sepals forming an erect lip with two erect linear to filiform lobes. P. nana has been found in New Zealand.

Anglesea has a number of heathlands rich in orchids. We saw only one, a small reserve on the main road. It contained spider orchids, two sun orchids, names not certain, and :

- * 17: DOTTED SUN-ORCHID: Thelymitra ixioides

The flower colour is violet, blue or mauve. The dorsal sepals and petals are marked with darker dots. This species has been found in Canterbury.

Angahook Forest Park and Lorne Forest Park are both well worth a visit. The former is dryish forest and the latter has a much greater rainfall although the two areas are only a few miles apart. Both contain orchids.

At Portland we were very fortunate in being shown over some of the area by a most experienced botanist Mr. A.C. Beauglehole. We first visited Bats Wing Ridge where we saw many orchids. Then followed a trip to Mount Richmond National Park, a small park of 1700 hectares noted for the variety and excellence of its wild flowers. Some 450 species of flowering plants including 50 odd species of orchids have been recorded here. Many of the orchids have disappeared due to the heavy growth of shrubs and trees.

At the Lower Glenelg National Park areas are burnt each year to encourage the growth of the smaller plants. Over 50 species of orchids have been found here. Some of the new orchids noticed were :

- * 18: VEINED SPIDER-ORCHID: Caladenia reticulata

This hairy orchid bears large yellowish green to crimson flowers. The sepals have a red central stripe, the upper portions of the sepals are filamentous with clavate tips.

- * 19: SALMON SUN-ORCHID: Thelymitra rubra

A very slender orchid with a flexuose stem and salmon pink to crimson flowers.

- * 20: TWISTED SUN-ORCHID: Thelymitra flexuosa

This orchid has a pinkish very wiry stem which zig-zags several times. There are stem bracts at the point of flexion. The flowers are pale yellow that only open on hot days.

- 21: SICKLE GREENHOOD: Pterostylis falcata

This orchid has 4 to 5 basal leaves with leaf like stem bracts. The flowers are large, the galea is up to 6 cm long, white with green lines and light brown markings, erect and sickle shaped.

- * 22: TINY GREENHOOD: Pterostylis parviflora

The 1 to 13 flowers are small, green in colour with darker green or brown stripes. The galea is erect.

We spent the evening in Mr. Beaglehole's herbarium looking through his wide collection of orchids and ferns.

The Grampians are the western extremity of the Great Dividing Range having a length of 95 km north to south and a width of some 55 km east to west. It is one of Australia's richest floral areas. There are numerous tracks some rising to a height of over 1000 m. We could traverse only a few of these tracks during our stay of five days at Halls Gap.

The road side down the Victoria Valley was gay with many large patches of orchids, Diuris being particularly common. Some of the new orchids noticed were :

* 23: MUSKY CALADENIA: Caladenia angustata

The flowers are up to $3\frac{1}{2}$ cm across, white or pink with bronze markings. The dorsal sepal is hooded, and the labellum bears red or purple dots.

* 24: LEOPARD ORCHID: Diuris maculata

This orchid has a stem up to 30 cm tall with 2 to 8 yellow flowers, heavily spotted with distinct brown spots. The underpart is more deeply spotted than the upper. The petals are orbicular, and the linear, lateral sepals have oblique tips which are crossed when the flowers mature.

We were favoured by being taken to Dalton Gorge area by Mr. Neil Bennett, a knowledgeable naturalist of that area. Some of the new orchids seen with him were :

* 25: PINK FAIRIES: Caladenia latifolia

This charming orchid was seen in great abundance near a quarry. It has an oblong hairy leaf with flowers up to $3\frac{1}{2}$ cm across coloured pink.

* 26: BRONZE CALADENIA: Caladenia iridescens

Its purple stem bears flowers of a dusky red colour which mingle into iridescent golden tints often with green tips to the segments. The dorsal sepals are erect, much incurved, and the lateral sepals are spreading.

27: PARSONS BANDS: Eriochilus cucullatus

The ovate, acute $3\frac{1}{2}$ cm leaves of this orchid are basal but are undeveloped at flowering time. The perfumed flowers are white or pale to light pink and the labellum is furry.

28: PURPLISH BEARD-ORCHID: Calochilus robertsonii

The labellum, 2-3 cm long, is widely triangular, the base fleshy, golden yellow and green covered with purple glands and densely bearded with long purple or bronze glistening hairs. The tip ends with a short glabrous ribbon.

The Little Desert of Victoria is an astonishing area of 35,300 hectares of sand. The whole is surrounded by most fertile lands with miles and miles of healthy grain crops. The Desert receives an annual rainfall of 400 mm, sufficient to enable the area to be covered

in vegetation. Over 600 species of plants have been recorded including many orchids. Some of the orchid species noted by us and not previously seen were :

* 29: RUSTY HOOD: Pterostylis biseta

A robust plant, its basal leaves often wither at flowering time. The reddish green flowers are on long slender pedicels. The lower tip is recurved with the lobes extended into long fine points facing out or down.

30: BEARDED GREENHOOD: Pterostylis barbata

Its numerous leaves are short and imbricate and are crowded at the base and extend up the scape. The galea is erect with a filiform point. An unusual feature is the 2½ cm labellum which is filiform covered with long golden lateral hairs and ending in a dark coloured knob. P. barbata can be found in New Zealand.

31: THICK-LIP SPIDER-ORCHID: Caladenia tessellata

A slender hairy plant with yellowish flowers containing brownish markings. The labellum, up to 2 cm wide, is broad ovate in shape and has a dark brown thickening towards the apex.

32: HOODED CALADENIA: Caladenia cucullata

The flowers are white with greenish brown markings and are 2 to 3 cm in diameter. The dorsal sepal is very hooded. The labellum is tri-lobed with the lateral lobes coloured a deep mauve. The stout calli are a deep purple mauve.

The memory of so many, many beautiful orchids will remain with me for a long time.

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