

SOME THOUGHTS ON *ORCHID CONSERVATION 97*

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When we first conceived a conference on Orchid Conservation, we knew we were embarking into difficult territory. While participants largely espouse Appendix I of CITES as it now stands, much of the listing on Appendix II may have hindered *ex situ* conservation as well as efforts by taxonomists to collect and document diversity. Discussions of conservation issues are usually restricted to variously chosen experts such as those that comprise the Orchid Specialists Group of the IUCN. In *Orchid Conservation 97* we decided to try a more democratic approach, one in which lay persons would be invited to speak along with professionals. This proliferated ideas that could not have been flooded had only experts been selected to participate.

Orchid conservation efforts lie basically in two camps—one favoring *in situ* conservation, the other favoring *ex situ* conservation. These camps can be rather pugnacious in their extreme.

Purists of the *in situ* camp believe that orchids can only be conserved in their native habitats. In its extreme form, they view plants collected and grown in greenhouses as having little use to conservation. They argue that seed production from collected plants introduces domestication under greenhouse conditions resulting in plants poorly adapted for reintroduction into the wild. Some would question the wisdom of salvaging rare orchids for replanting in other presumably suitable areas.

The *ex situ* camp in its extreme believes that tropical habitats are going, anyway, and that efforts for conservation of entire habitats cannot be reliably sustained. The *ex situ* camp would have free access for collection of all orchids from the wild, and would maintain them in conservatories, private as well as public. The *ex situ* conservationist views CITES as a major hurdle to its conservation efforts by impeding collection in the wild and transport across national borders. Persons committed to the *ex situ* camp may move plants from areas being developed to other presumably suitable areas. How does one measure success among efforts to salvage and re-establish? If individuals are willing to donate their time transplanting 1000 plants with only a single survivor, are we not better off than if we had not tried?

Throughout the conference I remained an eager listener, but found myself having trouble un-

derstanding the full gamut of orchid conservation issues and differences of opinion. But the key note speaker, the Hon. Alasdair Morrison, put a finger on the problem. Conservation means different things to different people. Considering people's origins in different cultures, one must marvel at any consensus. Conservation must be cast not only in the context of mankind's ethnic diversity but also of economic reality. People from less developed countries where conservation problems abound may view their diversity very differently than those of us from economically advantaged countries. Plant diversity may be seen as a national resource to be protected from exploitation by foreigners. The more fortunate among us see our activity as saving diversity from environmental destruction.

If there is nothing else to be gained from the conference it should be that conservation in a family of this size requires a multilateral approach. We need both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation efforts to maximize species survival, even if the result is preservation in gardens for enjoyment by man. This means that there is a place for collection from the wild, not only to document species as herbarium specimens but also to accumulate genetic stock for mass propagation by nurserymen. While we must always try to preserve orchids in their habitats, we must also try to save them through cultivation, especially with the available voluntary force. The success of developing populations of *Paphiopedilum delenatii* from a few wild collected plants and maintaining them through a world war attests to the potential for *ex situ* conservation efforts. Conservation cannot be sustained merely as an activity of the experts, but of lay individuals, as well. Grass-roots organizations proliferating both where orchid habitats abound and where orchids are propagated may hold the key for successful orchid conservation in its broadest sense.

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