

## AMESIELLA

One of the most amazing orchid genera, to be found in the Philippines, is the genus *Amesiella*. The reason for this is the size of the flowers, in relation to the size of the plant, which is most remarkable. The plant of an *Amesiella* species, and there are three species to be found in the mountains of Luzon and on the island of Mindoro, at the most would be about 10 centimeters across the leaves. When these plants are well grown they can produce several inflorescences, which have two to four blooms about five to six centimeters across the petals or sepals. The leaves are very stiff and leathery, and quite thick in *Amesiella monticola* and *Amesiella philippinensis*. This genus is endemic to the Philippines and found nowhere else on earth. It is also critically endangered in the wild, due to habitat destruction and over-collection for the nursery trade. Attempts should be made to grow the various *Amesiella* species from seed in flasks, so as to take the pressure off plants which are growing in the wild.

The genus was named in honor of the American botanist/taxonomist Professor Oakes Ames (1874-1950), who named many Philippine orchid species throughout his long and illustrious career. Professor Ames was also a professor of economic botany at Harvard University, and the founder of the Orchid Herbarium of Oakes Ames at the Harvard Botanical Museum.

*Amesiella minor* Senghas, was not named until 1999, and it has the smallest flowers, and plant, in the genus at about five centimeters across the petals, and the leaves of the plant. It can also be the most floriferous of the three species.

*Amesiella monticola* Cootes & D. Banks, was named in 1998, after the first author made a comprehensive study of this species and *Amesiella philippinensis*, both in the wild and in cultivation. The differences between the two species was more than enough to separate them into two species. *Amesiella monticola* has a much longer nectary (spur); the flowers of *Amesiella monticola* are a minimum of six centimeters across the lateral sepals; of an evening the flowers of *Amesiella monticola* are sweetly fragrant, in an attempt to lure its pollinator, which one would assume is a moth.



*Amesiella philippinensis* (Ames) Garay, was first named in 1907, by Professor Oakes Ames, as *Angraecum philippinensis*, from plants found on Mount Halcon, on the island of Mindoro, to the south of Luzon. At a later date more plants were found at high elevations in southern Luzon, and again in the mountains of central Luzon.

It is quite amazing that there are no confirmed sightings of this stunning species from either the islands of the Visayan Sea, or the mountainous island of Mindanao. The authors would be very happy to learn of this genus from the southern Philippines.

**IMPORTANT:** It needs to be noted here, that this genus will not grow, or prosper, let alone flower in the heat of the lowlands of the Philippines, as these are plants from high elevations. In their natural habitat the night time temperatures can get as low as 10 degrees Celsius, and there is constant cool, moisture laden air circulating around the plants. These conditions cannot be provided naturally in the lowlands.



References: Alrich P. & Higgins W. 2008. *The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens Illustrated Dictionary of Orchid Genera*. Comstock Publishing Associates.; Cootes J. 2011. *Philippine Native Orchid Species*. Katha Publishing, Quezon City.

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The fact that the colors in the flower have evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting; that means insects can see the colors. That adds a question: does this aesthetic sense we have also exist in lower forms of life?

~Richard P. Feynman. Physicist

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