

## RECENT TRAVELS AROUND THE ORCHID WORLD

### JOHAN HERMANS

#### *Recent Travels around the Orchid World*

The Irish Orchid Society welcomed Johan Hermans, a recent recipient of the highest accolade the RHS bestows, the Victoria Medal of Honour, on 9th May 2016. Johan has recently retired as Chairman of the RHS Orchid Committee a post he held for eight years. He was accompanied by his wife Clare, who has recently succeeded him as Chair of the said committee. Johan says that he never gives the same lecture twice so we were very lucky to attend this lecture and to benefit from his wide knowledge and excellent photography.

Johan began in his home area of Suffolk and showed us some orchids with which we are familiar in Ireland – *Ophrys apifera*, *Dactylorhiza viridis*, *Epipactis atrorubens*, and some native to the UK - *Orchis militaris* and *Liparis loeselii* (the Fen Orchid) which is very rare.

We travelled on to Ecuador which has very diverse orchids. Ecuagenera nursery featured briefly [<http://www.ecuagenera.com/>]. This nursery attends shows all over the world and grows enormous amounts of e.g. Masdevallias. We also saw *Cyrtorchilum macrantum* rambling through shrubbery and *Epidendron ibaguense* growing at the side of the road. Many varieties of Maxillaria and Sobralia are also quite common along the roadsides but what was probably the most impressive sight was *Cattleya maxima* collected by local people in its various colours and displayed in their gardens or draped over roofs and balconies.

Johan stressed that local guides are needed to locate some plants e.g. *Phragmipedium longifolium* and *P. hertzii* which grows on the side of a waterfall. In the cloud forest *Comparettia falcata*, *Elleanthus capitatus* (butterfly pollinated) and *Phragmipedium fischeri* (only discovered 10-15 years ago) are to be found. Johan describes *Elleanthus* species and *Phragmipedium pearcei* as easy to grow in cultivation always bearing in mind the wet conditions they need.

We then moved to a recent orchid show at the Tokyo Dome. This had excellent educational displays, e.g. a *Calanthe* nursery which used dolls in its display, a *Grammatophyllum speciosum* (see **Pollinia**, Vol.14, Issue One) displaying artificial flowers. Best in Show was a *Paphiopedilum* 'Emerald Future.'



The prize was a Mercedes automobile and £50,000. IOS members take note that such largesse is unlikely here.

The outstanding trip, however, was that taken to Madagascar 1-18 January 2016. This enormous island – 580,000 sq kms has many diverse habitats and the best time to see many of its plants, especially terrestrial orchids in bloom is during the January rainy season.

Epiphytic *Grammangis ellisii* is endemic to Madagascar and can be found in coastal forest and in humid evergreen forest with its branches overhanging rivers up to 1,300m. so it is really wide-ranging. Eulophias are to be found in the marshlands. *Cynorkis* has 150 species in Madagascar. *Cynorkis lindleyana* was described by Johan and is listed as a “slender terrestrial, 25-35cm tall; leaves 3-5, linear, acuminate; flowers purple-pink; lip entire, a little pandurate (fiddle-shaped;) spur almost cylindrical, wide at the base and a little contracted towards the middle, 7-9mm long. It grows in grassland, in marshes in peaty soil, in dry river-beds and flowers September to April.

I sensed that *Cynorkis flexuosa* is one of Johan’s favourites. This is described as “Terrestrial, 15-30cm tall; leaf 1, rarely 2, linear-ligulate (tongue-shaped;)

inflorescence few-flowered; flowers with green sepals and petals and a bright yellow lip, generally with two small reddish spots at base; sepals 8-9mm long; lip 4-lobed, 18mm long; spur 16-18mm long. It grows in grassland and rocky outcrops from sea-level–1,700m and flowers October-August.”

Then there is *Cynorkis gibbosa* growing by roadsides with its huge spotty leaves and enormous inflorescences.

This comes also in a yellow-flowered form. Johan marvels that all these species and those of *Angraecum* are still to be found in Madagascar, along with 30-40 species of chameleon, various lemurs, thousands of frogs, beetles, spiders, butterflies and moths all playing their parts in Nature’s great story.



*Cynorkis flexuosa* - Wikipedia



Johan concluded with a visit to Vercors National Park in Grenoble, France which he described as “a little Heaven for Orchids.” Here are to be found some lovely terrestrial orchids, e.g. *Himantoglossum hircinum*, various *Dactylorhiza* species, *Cephalanthera longifolia*, *Cypripedium calceolus* and *Corallorhiza trifida*, which has tiny flowers but no leaves.

This was an inspiring lecture delivered with humour. One must admire the passion and work of Clare and Johan who travel, climb, photograph, identify plants, enduring varied climates and habitats and bring us their story so we can marvel from the comfort of an auditorium. We wish them well in all their future travels and endeavours. ■

MARY BRADSHAW  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARY BRADSHAW

### A SIDE EFFECT

When the Irish Orchid Society invited Johan Hermans to talk to us last May many of us did not realise that a beneficial side effect would occur. In this case it is a strengthening between what is presently happening and what has happened in relation to orchids in Ireland and one of the leading orchid institutions in the world, the Royal Horticultural Society.

Johan has just stepped down as Chair of the RHS Orchid Committee; he has been replaced by his wife Clare. In relation to RHS Orchid Committee history this husband and wife pair have been prolific in their research and the publication of their results. As Frederick Moore of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, was so enthusiastic in his interest in orchids it was great to see the Hermans have the opportunity to look in the archives at some correspondence, photographs, auction catalogues and botanical illustrations of what was growing during his time. Many of the illustrations are of awarded plants which are good references for future awards in the same categories.

With the support of the Irish Orchid Society the new and strengthened relationships between foreign orchid related institutes and the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, grow into a truly good side effect.

BRENDAN SAYERS