

## MY RECOLLECTIONS - BRENDAN SAYERS

As a younger gardener in the late 1990s I had various visitors to the orchid house at the National Botanic Gardens. They were more than the usual number and all had the same mantra – 'you will have to set up a Society for orchid growers'. For years I resisted while Myrad Best, Jacques Grandjean, Scott McNaughten, Ulli Peiler, Tony Cullen and some others persisted. When the time came to relent I was adamant that the Society should be Glasnevin based. For here is the natural home of an Irish Orchid Society, within the walls and railings were our famous plants that carry that history were grown, and where the archive resides.

It is remarkable that in all the years that have passed, orchids still hold a mystique in relation to their cultivation and that there are still few amateurs in Ireland that have a dedicated orchid house. On the whole, we remain a group of growers who fill porches, windowsills and tables with our favoured plants. Therefore, I have always advocated that a reasonable balance be maintained when scheduling activities so that the amateur and more professional members of the Society are satisfied. It was also important over the years to try to keep native orchids on the agenda, though most members have a preference for those they grow indoors.

My highs over the years were in seeing members bring plants to flower and return them to that state year after year. It is also very satisfying to see members grow plants that one seldom sees in Irish collections and, most especially, species that have never flowered in cultivation in Ireland!

There is also the unseen side to the IOS that many members may not know about. The website is very much the world wide face of the IOS and a large amount of queries, most in relation to Irish natives, come our way. These are mainly answered by staff at the National Botanic Gardens but occasionally other members may be involved especially in relation to southern and western counties.

The most satisfying reflection is when we question the aims of our Society in bringing interested people together, educating ourselves and others about the orchid family and helping to conserve rare species. It is only on the last point that we do not score well but the opportunity to correct that may come in time.

Looking forward it would be nice to see the burden of running the Society shared among more than the few who seem omnipresent. It is a difficulty with small groups but I am sure there are members who may struggle with confidence but are well able to learn the various tasks needed in running a successful society.

When this is achieved we can set our sights further than we do now and may look at issues that fulfil the aim in which we do not score well – conservation. Active conservation projects other than those led by the National Parks and

Wildlife are few and far between. The Society's first aim to assist in this would be to actively record and encourage recording of native species on the National Biodiversity Data Centre web portal. An important tool in their conservation information on how common or rare a species is. This, in time may lead to the Society being an active participant in a conservation project or to be a source of funding for such activities.

However, for the moment we do need to continue what we are doing in promoting and enjoying orchids.

### BRENDAN SAYERS CHAIRMAN 2013-2018



Photography: Johan Hermans

### Awarded The Royal Horticultural Society's Westonbirt Orchid Medal 2017

