

# HOW I BECAME A MEMBER OF THE IRISH ORCHID SOCIETY

My first orchid was a cymbidium – a gift from staff on leaving a previous job. It was a stunning specimen with four spikes and flowers of white with faint pink lines, but once it had finished flowering I simply put it out in the back garden. In the absence of any knowledge about cymbidium care or orchids in general, I quickly proceeded to make mistakes, such as re-potting it into a much larger terracotta pot and using peat-moss as the medium. Luckily for me, cymbidiums are hardy plants and mine became a giant on a weekly diet of full-strength tomato food and summer rain-showers. Come spring-time, I was surprised to see new shoots at the base of the plant, and seeking advice was re-directed by a colleague to the IOS and the imminent annual orchid fair. My first point of contact was with Tom P. who himself grows cymbidiums, and who was quite surprised to hear that mine was flourishing in peat-moss! Several years later and having acquired several more orchids, cymbidiums still remain my favorite orchid due to their hardy nature, strong architectural shape and long-lasting flowers.

**DEIRDRE MCGRANE**

## **My interest in the Irish Orchid Society**

My sister got a present of a Phalaenopsis over 10 years ago which didn't do too well, so I said I'll revive that no problem and repotted it into garden soil and fed it a good dose of BabyBio. It died soon after.

I wondered why.

I saw a sign for an Orchid Fair above the café in the National Botanic Gardens later that year and was amazed at the variety and sheer colour of these little plants so I joined in the hope of keeping my second Phalaenopsis alive.

## **My Advice**

The thing I've most learnt is to research a little before you buy. If your house is cold (which mine is) that beautiful blooming orchid you've bought at the Orchid Fair just won't thrive if it requires heat. The advice I've got over the years from other members has kept numerous orchids alive but of course I've killed a substantial number too - mainly through buying the wrong orchid for the wrong spot.

Paphiopedilums are my favourite but they just don't do well in my house (unless I have a lodger who likes heat then they'll rebloom!). I keep buying them and they keep dying. And I'll continue to keep buying them!

Cymbidiums on the other hand flourish as they seem to love my cold conditions. I neglect them outside for most of the year and bring them in when I see frost and a couple of months later they'll bloom (It's taken me 5 years to learn that though!). It gives me great pride and joy to see the results of your efforts, and the blooms can last a few months too.

## **Ambitions**

My terrier Tazzi (as some members may be familiar with) when stressed or anxious, she'll hop up on the table grab an orchid pull the pot off and chew the roots. Her ambition is to attend one of our potting workshops. That aside, the orchid society has been a staple in my life for over 10 years. I'm developing more of an interest in the smaller unpronounceable orchids (mainly because the Cymbidiums are taking over and I've little space), so a few challenges lie ahead.

**LISA COFFEY**



I've been a member of the **Irish Orchid Society** since its beginning. I've played various roles on various committees. The most exciting thing about orchids is their infinite variety and their enormous presence on the planet.

My growing capacity is limited but nothing beats the pleasure of finding *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *okellyi*, *Ophrys apifera* or *Epipactis palustris* in flower during our Irish summertime, except, perhaps, seeing *Angraecum sesquipedale* in bloom at Glasnevin and realizing how important this plant is to our understanding of evolution and human progress.

I have learned a lot from IOS members but I know I have much more to learn.

**MARY BRADSHAW**



#### *DACTYLORHIZA FUCHSII* VAR. *OKELLYI*

Most Irish and British botanists stress that *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *okellyi* (some authors view this as subspecies or even as species) must not be mixed up with the white forms of *fuchsii*.

Anne and Simon Harrap (*Orchids of Britain and Ireland*, 2005) are writing: "A lot of controversy surrounds *okellyi*" and explain: "In The Burren and elsewhere these classic white-flowered *okellyi* are just part of a population of plants with a variable flower colour".

Brendan Sayers and Susan Sex (*Ireland's Wild Orchids*, 2008) stress that *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *okellyi* flowers late, beginning in July. The photo in their field guide shows a flower with a labellum, which is deeply divided into three lobes.

Charles Nelson (*Wild Plants of The Burren and the Aran Islands*, 2008) indicates that *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* f. *okellyi* flowers from June to August and has pure white flowers "without any pink tints or marks" and a "lip flat with 3 almost equal, deeply-cut lobes".

According to Pierre Delforge (*Guide des orchidées d'Europe*, 2005), who mentions a flowering period from May to July, the labellum has a maximum width of 8 mm (in contrast to *fuchsii* with 8-16 mm). Pat O'Reilly and Sue Parker (*Wild Orchids in The Burren*, 2007) have noted that "groups of pure-white orchids ... are more likely to be O'Kelly's Spotted-orchids than single plants, which might be just very pale examples of the Common Spotted-orchid".

When exploring the limestone pavements between Poulsallagh and Rockforest you'll find lots of white-flowered *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, rather small and with a pyramidal spike in the beginning of flowering, which are very similar to pink-flowered plants of the species – they should be considered as albiflora forms. Two times I found a pair of taller plants, very slender and with a distinct appearance of spike or flowers, which could be addressed as *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* var. *okellyi*.

<http://www.albiflora.eu/blog>