

# Orchid Society of Santa Barbara



**Meeting: Wednesday, March 10, 2002**

**Louise Lowry Davis Recreation Center**  
**1232 De La Vina** (at De La Vina and Victoria)  
*Meeting begins at 7:30 pm*

## **PROGRAM**

**Bob Hamilton**

will speak about

### **Odontoglossums: Their History and Culture**

Odontoglossums were the most coveted orchid of the Victorian orchid craze, but are seen less frequently today in the broad climatic range of most hobby collections. Fortunately, enthusiasts like the late Robert Dugger, Howard Liebman, and Bob Hamilton keep these beauties around for us to enjoy. Santa Barbara is one of the areas where odonts can prosper, so come hear Bob Hamilton tell us about the history of these delightful orchids. Hamilton, who does his own laboratory work and has developed protocols for orchid chromosome doubling, has specialized in odonts since 1980. This is your opportunity to learn from a specialist in the genus!

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**South Bay Orchid Show, "Kaleidoscope of Orchids"**  
2002

April 13-14,

Torrance Cultural Arts Center, 3330 Civic Center Drive, Torrance.

**ANNUAL DUES!!!!** If you do not pay your OSSB dues for 2002, this will be your last newsletter. If you have paid your dues, your label will have a *Jan 2003* notation. You may pay your dues at the March meeting or mail a check for \$20, payable to OSSB, to Carole Cowan, 209 Cedar Lane, Santa

## Summary of the January 2002 Meeting

- President Jeff Thompson welcomed visitors and guests. Visitors who sign the guest book receive 2 months of free newsletters!
- President Thompson thanked the membership for their generosity in January. The society made a profit of about \$90 on the January raffle table. Society members also donated about \$100 to the special speakers' fund. Look for the speakers' fund donation pot at future meetings (or buy generously at the raffle table!).
- President Thompson reminded everyone about the Spring Show, March 8-10, 2002. The society once again requested plants for the society exhibit (plants to arrive at noon at the Earl Warren Show Grounds). Sign up sheets for sales and hospitality were passed amongst the membership. Carole Cowan reminded everyone that blooming plants sell the best at the society's booth at the show. (Editor's note: If you have not visited the show at the time you receive this, make an effort to go! It is an educational opportunity, in addition to being a chance to buy plants from a large variety of vendors.)
- The society wants your plants for the Five Cities show, March 23-24. OSSB will install a tabletop exhibit in the Five Cities show. If you have something blooming to lend for the exhibit, call Jeff Thompson at 563-4376.

### Program

Vice President Frank Methmann introduced our speaker, Matt Swift of Swift's Orchids. Before joining his father in opening a retail orchid outlet, Swift worked at Stewart Orchids and the Santa Barbara Orchid Estate, and was a member of OSSB. Today, in addition to his business, Swift is membership secretary for the Cymbidium Society of America.

Swift treated the membership to an

engaging treatise on culture of equitant oncidiums. These miniature plants with the fleshy leaves and no pseudobulbs were reclassified into the genus *Tolumnia* about eight years ago by the taxonomist Guido Braem. Though their hybrids (and there are many) are still registered in the genus *Oncidium*, they often are called tolumnias by their enthusiasts.

Tolumnias are natives of the Caribbean, growing on bare twigs in bright sunlight. Typical temperatures in the region are 62°F at night and 82°F at day.

Swift noted that many growers fail with tolumnias by not allowing them to dry out. Tolumnias grown in houses often suffer a combination of overwatering and humidity that is too low. In addition, these dainty plants prefer high light levels, doing better with cattleya-level light than in the shadier company of paphs and phals.

To avoid overwatering, Swift recommended an open mix consisting of one part fine bark, one part pea gravel or red lava, and one part number three perlite. Charcoal is another useful addition that can appear in a mix. These miniature plants should be placed in very small pots (Swift highly recommends clay) and watered with one's cattleyas.

Swift noted that fertilizer is not a magic potion if one's culture is poor.

Swift repots every one to two years when the weather is becoming warm (January to July). He places styrofoam peanuts or a rock at the bottom and will divide large plants, which tend to die out in the center. Clay pots that are to be reused should be washed with a fungicide or bleach, then baked in the oven (350° for an hour) to kill virus. Plants with long rhizomes are better mounted, but require high humidity. Swift mounts on twigs, but notes that compact tree fern can accumulate salts.

Swift observed that tolumnias flower in the spring, with flowers lasting up to a month. Many will branch on the same spike for a second or third bloom, giving flowers until July.

Swift showed photos of a number of *Tolumnia* flowers in addition to several sample plants in spike and flower. *Onc.* Golden Sunset is robust and easy, a large plant for a tolumnia with eight inch leaves. Other hybrids he mentioned included *Onc.* Magic, *Onc.* Fan Dancer, and *Onc.* Tom Wilson. Tolumnias have "dancing lady" style flowers with bright colors and markings typically in shades of whites, reds, yellows or browns.

## An Amateur Ponders Taxonomy

By Heidi Kirkpatrick

Have you heard? Some species of *Odontoglossum* are now *Cyrtochilum*. Equitant oncidiums are really *Tolumnia*, and this when I was just beginning to figure out what “equitant” means. And then there is *Lemboglossum*, which appeared briefly as a genus before being superceded by *Rossioglossum*. Or was it the other way around? And will my poor plants ever have the correct labels?

When I first began growing orchids, I was convinced, like many of my peers, that the sole purpose of taxonomy was to bedevil humble hobbyists like myself. Just when I began to learn all those dreadful Latin plant names, someone would tell me that taxonomists had declared a few of them to be out of date.

I knew the hobbyists’ mantra by heart. Why can’t they just leave all those tongue-twisting Latin names the heck alone!

And then one day someone pointed out to me that species of the genus *Paphiopedilum* – one of my personal favorites, by the way – used to be classified as *Cypripedium*, along with phrags and what I considered to be the “real” cyps, namely those cold-weather lady-slippers I’d never dared to grow. Well, gee, I thought, anybody could see they didn’t belong in the same genus. Maybe there was more to taxonomy than serving as an irritant to innocent growers.

So what exactly is taxonomy? My Webster’s says it is the “orderly classification of plants and animals according to their presumed natural relationships.” In other words, human beings just love putting the natural world in neat little classification boxes, even when the natural world isn’t particularly cooperative.

It is easy to see the difference between a cattleya and a paph, but I would be the first to admit that dividing a genus into species has got to be trickier. Most paph species might look different from each other to my untrained eye (although there are a number of troublesome species!), but what about those look-a-like *Restrepia* species? Or, worse yet, the huge group of 1600 species belonging to *Bulbophyllum*? (Yes, taxonomists are working to break that down into *Bulbophyllum*, *Megaclinum*, and *Cirropetalum*.)

Maybe this taxonomy stuff is trickier than it

first appears. After all, they can’t just divvy things up by color, not when some species have so many color forms. As for the basic shape of the flower ... well you already know what I think of calling all lady slipper orchids cypripediums.

So how do taxonomists do their jobs? They make decisions based on a detailed study of the structure of the plant and its flower. Is that why there are so many doggone names for all the parts of an orchid flower?

Now imagine being a taxonomist in the early days of orchid collecting. Orchid hunting was a dangerous occupation, taking collectors into wild lands to face hostile locals, ferocious beasts, and deadly diseases. Taxonomists who stayed home had to rely on plants that survived the grueling ordeal of transportation by slow boat travel. Or they might have been faced with a specimen that had been pressed in the field. If you have ever pressed a flower between the pages of a book, you can guess as well as I can what a poor substitute a pressed specimen might be.

But publishing a name for a new species holds a certain cachet – and the rules of the game say that the first to publish gets the honor of doing the naming. Sometimes, however, the description might wind up in an obscure journal, only to be rediscovered at a much later date. A modern taxonomist would be obligated to support the earliest published name for a species, despite disapproval from confused growers.

I have no doubt that a few early species descriptions were made by people with a shaky understanding of orchids. Other well-intentioned taxonomists did the best they could without complete information. Certainly, they could not do in-depth genetic analysis as is being done today to the whole confusion of odontoglossums and oncidiums.

So maybe taxonomists aren’t thoughtlessly confusing me while on a self-serving mission to publish new revisions and keep themselves employed. And that means I have to admit today’s taxonomists are playing the name game in response to new information and better classification criteria and techniques. Okay, maybe they’re doing the right thing, but, as I rewrite my labels yet again, I don’t have to like it!

### **Announcements**

- **World Orchid Conference** April 25-May 3, 2002 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Malaysia Airlines has a package of roundtrip airfare from LAX to Kuala Lumpur plus three nights hotel (additional nights extra) for \$699. Contact Nancy Benay (Newport Harbor OS) at ndbenay@uci.edu or weeknights (949)552-7713.
- **New Meeting Location for April!** Beginning in April, we will meet at Louise Lowry Davis Center, at the corner of Victoria and De La Vina. Mark your calendars! OSSB will continue to

meet on the second Wednesday of the month, but we will be meeting at Louise Lowry Davis through the end of the year. There is a well lit parking lot adjacent to the building with an entrance on Victoria.

- **Laelias at the Zoo.** Paul Gripp and Jeff Thompson are arranging another orchid mounting expedition at the Santa Barbara Zoo for March 16 or 17. Jeff will announce date, time and other details at the March 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, or call him at 563-4376 for information. Come support our ongoing project to educate visitors to the zoo about the beauty of orchids.

- **Report on the Meeting of the Board of February 18, 2002.**

The board met to discuss the results of the member survey that appeared in the February newsletter.

Thanks to everyone who responded. There were a number of good ideas offered by the membership. The board approved the following measures.

– Annual dues for OSSB will be \$25 beginning in 2003. The fee structure will remain the same as it is currently, with dues being per household.

– The society will no longer subsidize the cost of the annual BBQ. Details about date and price of the BBQ will appear in subsequent newsletters; beginning this year, however, the price of the BBQ will reflect the cost per person to OSSB.

– Beginning in April 2002, the society will keep 25% of the sale price of plants sold through OSSB, including plants at the silent auction and plants at the society booth at the spring show.

If you have questions about these issues or would like a copy of the minutes of the board meeting, please contact Heidi Kirkpatrick at 563-2894 or [g\\_pierce@juno.com](mailto:g_pierce@juno.com)

*See OSSB on the web at [www.west.net/~orchidsb](http://www.west.net/~orchidsb)*

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