

The Orchid Conservation Alliance
564 Arden Drive
Encinitas, CA 92024



ORCHID CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

October 9, 2011

Dear OCA Member:

Report from Colombia

WOW! Two weeks in Colombia looking at orchids in private collections, nurseries, parades, flowers shows, and jungles. Dry forest in Colombia? Tortillas made from plantains pounded flat with a rock? A game whose goal is to toss a brass ring into a frog's mouth? Talking to people about reserves. Pondering unknown fruits in roadside stands. A rock wall covered with hundreds, if not thousands, of *Phragmipedium longifolia* in bloom? Where to start?

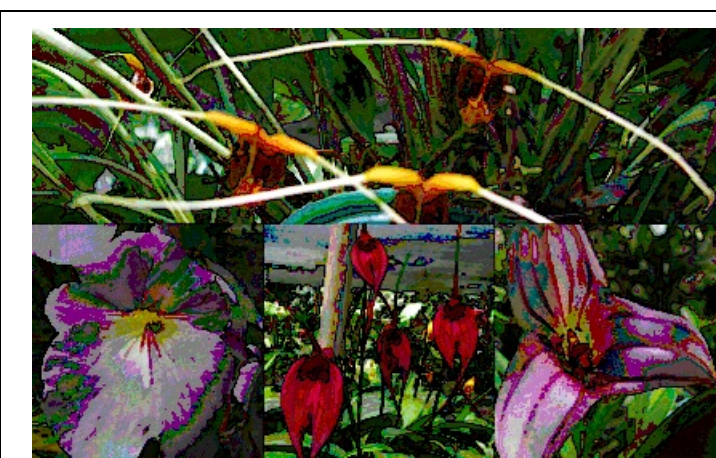
The Silleteros' parade, roughly 'parade of the flower growers', in Medellin had its 54th running while we were at the beginning of our trip. This parade is not well known outside Colombia, but it should be, as it easily rivals Pasadena's Parade of Roses. Imagine 6-8 foot diameter flower arrangements such as those shown carried on people's backs in a parade lasting three hours encompassing more than 400 such arrangements.

Daniel Piedrahita is said to be one of Colombia's best growers and a visit to his nursery left no doubt about it. Every plant was large, pristine, and most had lots of perfect flowers. Imagine the 4-5 inch *Miltonia vexillaria* at the left in the lower figure. Now imagine twelve spikes of 8-9 flowers covering a single plant! I am mentioning only Daniel Piedrahita for lack of space. Many other orchid growers and nursery owners made us very welcome. Anyone who skipped this trip for fear of the drug violence which we have heard about for the last decade should know that we never felt any threat.

After several days in and around Medellin, whose museums, flower show, and orchid show should not be missed, we headed south through the Valle de Cauca. We took several days to reach Cali, stopping for hikes and nurseries along the way. The Cauca river occupies a long, fertile valley, where



Scenes from the Silleteros' Parade, Medellin.



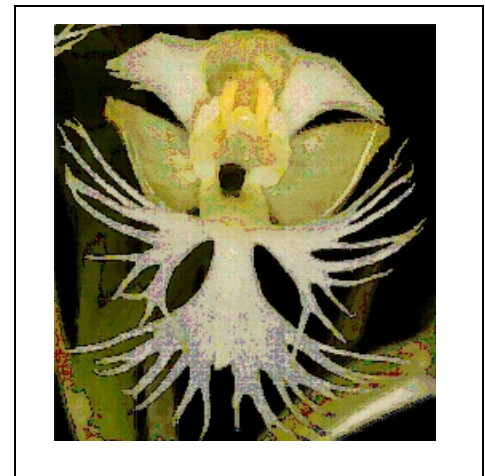
Orchids in Daniel Piedrahita's collection.

excellent coffee is grown in the north and where sugar cane is dominant in the south. The mountains to the west have many orchids in their upper elevations. I thought that these would be exclusively wet forests, but it was in a dry forest, reminiscent of central Texas, that we saw *Cattleya quadricolor* and *Encyclia ceratistes* as well as several maxillarias, cyrtopodiums, and a vanilla, among other species. We also saw lots of other orchids at wetter sites. Among these were *Dracula chimaera*, with one in bloom, and lots of different restrepias, lepanthes, epidendrums, cyrtochilums, to drop a few names.

I'm giving somewhat short shrift to the plants we saw in the wild because I want to talk about the orchid conservation activity we saw and heard about. The visit that will probably lead to our funding the purchase of one or more parcels of land was with Jorge Orejuela. Jorge Orejuela is the director of the Cali Botanical Garden and a professor in the environmental sciences department at the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente in Cali. Prof. Orejuela has already established several reserves in Colombia and he is at work enlarging those and developing new ones. We are following up with him on which areas are most essential for orchid protection. Search 'Orejuela' at nationalgeographic.com for more on Jorge. Orejuela and his long term friend Antonio Patiño Santa have published a gorgeous new book on the orchids of southwestern Colombia entitled "Orchids in the Mist". When it becomes available in English, which should be soon, the OCA will carry it through the web site. Between Medellin and Cali we visited several private reserves which focus on orchids as well as plants, birds, and the environment in general. I was very impressed with the number of reserves that exist in Colombia and the energy which people have expended in creating them. Another reason I think Colombia will be a fertile place to establish more orchid reserves is the Colombian Network of Private Nature Reserves (Resnatur). Resnatur provides essential training and networking opportunities for anyone involved in reserve development. Currently there are over 500 reserves affiliated in Resnatur. This yields enormously important clout with authorities at all levels of government.

It would be a great mistake to close without stating our great debt to Andrea Nissen and Juan Carlos Uribe. They are the proprietors of Orquideas del Valle, a fine Colombian nursery, and the local organizers of our trip. They made wonderful suggestions for the trip, made all the local arrangements, and held our hands for two weeks. We visited their nurseries and their homes and were exceptionally well looked after. Anyone visiting Colombia should consult them for orchid resources. Andrea and Juan Carlos, thank you again.

The **2012 OCA calendar** has been put together by Mary Gerritsen and will go to press this week. It features stunning images of 13 of the world's most endangered orchids (At right *Platanthera leucophaea*, North America's Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid, believed to be extirpated from Indiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and South Dakota). As a member you will receive a free copy. Calendars for gift giving or for sale by societies are as follows, note that these prices include ground shipping: 1-10, \$8.50 each; 11-25, \$7.50 each; 26-100, \$6.50 each; 101 and over, \$6.00 each. Of the 1000 that will be printed 325 will be sent out to the membership so be sure to get your order in if you or your society want some extra. Please see our web site to order calendars.



Happy Growing to all,

Peter S. Blais