



# news

Volume 14.1 - January 2002

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Welcome	I hope everyone had a Good Holiday Season.
RBG Species Collection	Another show season is in full swing. Hope everyone has had a successful show financially, bloom-wise shows are always successful. I am sure the COC Meeting at the Saskatchewan O.S. Show will be very successful.
Speakers Tour	Since this is the blooming season, many of us are waiting for that special plant to bloom. I have several plants that had not bloomed before come into bloom, I have not been disappointed. It is such a thrill when they come up to expectation.
Comparettia	The time for repotting and grooming the plants for the next year is at hand. This also is a good time to inspect the plants to make sure they are in good health.
Upcoming Events	I look forward to seeing many of you in Saskatoon.

*Lynne Cassidy, President*

## Welcome

J'aimerais souhaiter bienvenue aux Orchidophiles de Québec, des nouveaux membres de la Fédération canadienne des sociétés orchidophiles. Joint récemment, les Orchidophiles de Québec sont une addition important pour la Fédération.

I wish to welcome Les Orchidophiles de Québec as a new member to the Canadian Orchid Congress. Les Orchidophiles de Québec joined recently and will make a valuable addition to the Congress.

# THE NEW WORLD ORCHID SPECIES AND DISPLAY COLLECTION OF THE ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

This New World Orchid Species and Display Collection was founded in 1983 as a joint venture between the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Canada and the Orchid Society of the Royal Botanical Gardens. The purpose of the venture was to collect as many species of the New World as possible, catalogue them, maintain them in a well-ordered greenhouse and make them available for education, display and research. Donations have been received from private individuals, Canadian and United States growers, the Smithsonian collection, Longwood Gardens, the Montreal Botanical Gardens, the Wheeler Collection at Ball State University, the Los Angeles Arboretum, and many interested individuals. At the present time flowering orchid plants are displayed in an enclosed case in the main lobby of the headquarters building of the RBG. At present, the collection is not open to the general public. Even before the proposed tropical houses were constructed, additional exhibition space could be found in already existing areas of the greenhouse complex. In the recent catalogue of Orchid collections listed in the October edition of ORCHIDS, the official bulletin of The American Orchid Society, the RBG was noticeably absent. Part of our concern seeks to remedy this so that the RBG will expand into tropical horticulture and extend its mandate as a world class botanical gardens.

The collection is the property of the Royal Botanical Gardens and under the general supervision of the Interior Landscaping department. Maintenance of the collection is under the jurisdiction of the RBG which is responsible for the greenhouse structure, heating, shading, air movement, watering and humidity. A "greenhouse auxiliary" made up of members of the Orchid Society assists the horticulturists of the RBG in caring for the collection. Financing of the collection, beyond the above mentioned requirements is generally managed by the Orchid Society of the RBG. Construction labour is generally provided by the RBG.

Most of the financing of the collection is taken care of by the profits of the annual orchid exhibition, generally held in March. A committee made up of three members of the orchid society and three members of the RBG staff allocates funds and provides general policy directives for the collection. An endowment fund has been initiated in order to ensure the continuation of the collection and donations are encouraged from the general public.

At present there are about 2000 plants in the collection housed in the greenhouse attached to the headquarters of the RBG. Donations of species native to North and South America are especially encouraged. Plants must be

mature, robust, well-rooted, pest and disease-free and accurately labeled. Donors whose annual contributions are over \$100 (independently assessed) are entitled to a tax receipt. Although some display and hybrid plants have been received, they along with duplicates will be the first plants to be disposed of as space requirements demand. The proceeds of such disposal will be used entirely for the maintenance of the collection. At the moment donations of species cattleyas and oncidiums are especially preferred. Donations must be mature plants and disease and pest free and become the property of the RBG.

It is hoped that the research dimension of the collection will be developed in the near future. To this end and for the instruction of the members of the RBG the Orchid society has developed a substantial library. Donations are also requested for the library and members of Canadian orchid societies who come into possession of rare documents related to orchid research are encouraged to deposit them with the professional staff of the RBG library for safe-keeping and expanded circulation. The educational dimension, at present is currently managed through a speaker's program administered by the RBG's Outreach Program and an annual course, "Getting Started with Orchids" taught by members of the society under the auspices of the RBG's educational program.

Application has been made to the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada to designate the RBG collection as a rescue centre for plants seized by Agriculture Canada or CITES administrators because their importation has not followed proper procedures. This arrangement has been sought with the advice of similar centers in the United States administered by the Los Angeles Arboretum and The Smithsonian Institute in Washington. The application is under consideration, but so far the necessary cabinet orders have not been processed. The appointment of a specialist in tropical horticulture would facilitate such a designation. In September the first shipment of about 350 seized plants was transferred to the RBG.

This application is only one aspect of the conservation of endangered species which is foremost in the program of the New World species collection. In the near future it is expected that propagation programs, research projects, visitations to native orchid habitats, virus identification programs and collecting trips will expand the already substantial program of the Orchid Society of the Royal Botanical Gardens. By means of donations, visits exchange of speakers and an exchange of mutual concerns for the conservation of orchids and development of the collec-

tion, all members of Canadian orchid societies interested in expanding orchid conservation are invited to contribute to the collection. The appointment of a tropical horticultural specialist would facilitate and coordinate all such programs.

Currently the successful mounting of the web site for Canadian terrestrial orchids has attracted considerable attention and is very much in line with international and national conservation enthusiasms. Two members of the society are members of international organizations dedicated to rescue and preservation of orchid species. The RBG should be at the centre of such efforts and do everything possible to promote such conservation. A specialty in terrestrial orchids should be considered as one priority for the expected appointment.

The outstanding results of the Alexander Parker Orchid Propagation Laboratory warrants further expansion and could become not only an important aspect of both tropical and native orchid conservation, but also a significant source of income. The current enthusiasm in many horticulturalists is the propagation of native orchids with a view to replanting them in the wild and such participation by our lab facilities would make the RBG a leader in this field. Expansion of the web page on the RBG web site would distribute information about Canadian orchids on a world wide scale.

Not only would the further development of the orchid collection add to the year round tourist attractions to the RBG, but a number of activities could generate significant income which would help to offset the cost of appointing a qualified specialist. Listing the orchid collection as a "winter" activity would become a significant

addition to the Ontario Government's attempts to attract larger numbers of tourists to Canada during the winter season. This could amount to considerable increase in revenue for the RBG and the Government of Ontario. This is certainly the case at the Montreal Botanical Gardens. Applications to the Ministry of Tourism should be explored as well as requests from the American Orchid Society, and the Conservation committee of the Mid American Congress of the American Orchid Society.

In addition the following sources of revenue could profit the RBG and contribute to the expense of the cost of employing a full time specialist: proceeds from the annual Christmas Orchid Auction; a portion of the profits from the annual Orchid show held in March; the sale of endangered tropical and native orchid flasks; possible institution of an annual "Summer Orchid Fair" and many other activities which carry potential revenue because of our central location to the major societies in southern Ontario.

It is with considerable satisfaction that the current members of the orchid society have recently learned that orchid display and preservation will be central to the new expansion program recently undertaken by the Royal Botanical Gardens under the leadership of Sharylin Ingram.

James D. Brasch  
September 21, 2001  
Royal Botanical Gardens  
680 Plains Road West  
Burlington, Canada L7T 4H4  
Native Orchids of Canada compiled by  
the Orchid Society of Royal Botanical Gardens -  
<http://www.rbg.ca/orchids/>

## SPEAKERS TOUR

The tentative speaker for 2002 COC Canada-Wide tour is Andrea Niessen of Orquideas de Valle in Cali Colombia. I understand she is an excellent speaker and she speaks English fluently. Her plants are said to be very good. Ingrid Ostrander has ordered plants from her and has been very pleased with them. Coming from Colombia she would have some unusual species well worth adding to your collection.

So far I have had a response from 11 societies. To make the tour feasible and keep the cost within reason I feel at least 15 societies will be needed. The cost will be a bit higher than 2001, because of the higher airfare. I will try to keep the cost per society as close to \$200.00 as possible. The time frame would be the month of September. Any society interested please contact me as soon as possible so I can reserve the time with Ms. Niessen.

Email - [lynne.cassidy@telus.net](mailto:lynne.cassidy@telus.net). Telephone - (604) 536-8185.

# COMPARETTIA

*Comparettia* are a group of small plants in the *Oncidinae* tribe which feature long spikes of brightly colored flowers. They have somewhat exacting cultural conditions, but if one can come close to their desired habitat, they are rapid growers and very rewarding plants. The genus is named after Andreo Comparetti, a nineteenth century Professor of Botany at Padua University in Italy.

The plants themselves consist of very small pseudobulbs hidden by one or two leaves. The leaves are usually five to ten centimeters in length but are reported to reach thirty centimeters long in some cases. Being slightly thickened the leaves are a good source of information on the health of the plant: they should be stiff and turgid. If they are shriveled or limp it indicates the plant is not getting enough water, usually due to rotten roots or no roots at all. Happily if caught before they are too desiccated, *Comparettias* seem more than ready to produce a new set of roots, unlike some other orchids which stubbornly refuse to grow a new root unless it is the right time of year and the anxious grower hasn't spoken to them too harshly. The roots are very thin (less than 1 mm in diameter) and can run for long distances in a suitable habitat. The flower stems are similarly thin and tend to be somewhat pendant in nature and bear five to twenty or sometimes up to fifty flowers. The inflorescence will often branch and provide one or more additional bursts of flowers after the initial flowers have faded, so if the plant is healthy do not remove the flower stem until it has actually dried up. The flowers last a relatively short period of time, up to two weeks, and tend to bloom simultaneously rather than sequentially. The flowers are unique in that there are two long, spur-like tails on the lip which are enclosed by a spur formed by the fused lateral sepals. It would be most interesting to learn what Darwin's explanation of this unique structure would have been. The two upper petals and dorsal sepal are relatively small, with the show piece of the flower, as is typical of the *Oncidinae*, being the large spreading lip. The flowers are typically in the size range of two to four centimeters, similar to an equitant *Oncidium* flower.

There are, according to Hawkes and Bechtel, Cribb and Launart up to twelve different species, however, Jesup maintains there are only four distinct species available horticulturally, while the American Orchid Society has awarded five species and Sanders reports hybrids stemming from five species - unfortunately, not the same five species. In any event, the commonly recognized species are:

*Comp. coccinea*: From Brazil with yellow and red flowers with a scarlet lip. Not, it appears, ever awarded by the AOS, although it has been used in hybridization.

*Comp. falcata* Wide-spread in Central America and Northern South America, including as discussed below, Venezuela. Flowers are rose-pink in color, typically with some white markings. Also called, *Comp. rosea*.

*Comp. ignea* Little information is available about this species, although it is likely from Colombia, having been recognized with a CBR/AOS at a show in Medellin. Reported to have an orange lip with yellow sepals and petals, sounding circumstantially like *Comp. coccinea*.

*Comp. macroplectron* From Ecuador, pale pink with rose-purple spotting. A well known species, recognized with AOS awards on many occasions.

*Comp. peruviana* The least well known of the species, flowers of an orange color similar to *Comp. speciosa*, however, apparently a separate species as the AOS has awarded a Certificate of Botanical Recognition to the species. The plants of this species which I have grown tend to have very small flowers when compared with *Comp. speciosa*, perhaps explaining the limited interest in this species.

*Comp. speciosa* From Ecuador, bright orange flowers tending to scarlet in the lip. A well known, and perhaps the most beautiful species, it has been awarded many times by the AOS.

This genus is part of a group of orchids known as "twig epiphytes", which indicates that they naturally grow on the extremities of bushes and trees. G.C.K. Dunsterville reported that he found *Comparettia falcata* growing on a Norfolk Island Pine tree (*Araucaria excelsa*) originally planted as a Christmas tree in his yard in Caracas, Venezuela. Guava trees are reported as another natural host. The environment in which these plants grow has led to some particular specializations in the plants which are relevant to the cultivation of these plants:

- The roots are used to growing in open air, or along thin branches. Plants are often reported in nature hanging from their host by a single root.
- The plants grow quickly and bloom easily, as the length of time that a twig at the extremity of a rapidly growing host plant receives enough light and water to grow before it is hidden in the depths of the host is limited.
- The plants are adapted to grow in lower light situations than some other orchids.
- The plants life spans are reportedly quite short, similar to other orchids such as *Catesetums* which grow in locations with a limited life span.

Many hybrids have been made with *Comparettias*, often with a *Rodriguezia* species as the other parent. These

hybrids are typically of a similar plant format but with a wider variety of color in the flowers, and of an easier to grow nature. *Comparettias* have really come in to their own when involved in hybrids with *Odontoglossum* where they lend their brilliant colors to larger flowers on more conventional plants. The American Orchid Society has seen fit to be bestow First Class Certificates on a number of these hybrids, particularly clones of *Odontorettia* Ronald Ciesinski (*Odontoglossum uro-skinneri* x *Comp. speciosa*).

For the most part these plants do not consider flower pots to be a suitable habitat. Jesup reports that they do well in clay pots with many holes in the sides, but otherwise, mounting seems to be the correct approach. The difficulty in growing them is a result of their natural desire to have their roots in open air or running along branches in the open air. For growers with humid greenhouses, or who live in locations blessed with naturally humid environments this may not be a very big problem. For the rest of us, growing them in dry climates and/or on windowsills in our houses a more inventive approach is called for.

Living here in Calgary, where the humidity outside is routinely as low as 15%, I have evolved a method of growing these plants which while perhaps not the best environment does seem to meet with their approval. I grow the plants on tree fern poles of approximately 30 cm by 5 cm by 5 cm. The plant is mounted approximately half way up this pole. Then the pole is placed in a 15 cm clay pot (not glazed), which is in turn placed in a 15 cm plastic "pot bottom". The whole ensemble is then placed in the growing area. Water is applied to the point of filling the "pot bottom", as well as drenching the tree fern pole. This leaves the very bottom of the tree fern, and the clay pot sitting in water. Each time the plant is watered (sprayed) I also refill the "pot bottom". The water soaks into the clay pot from which it evaporates and also wicks up the tree fern to some extent, providing the plant with a modest amount of residual moisture and a reasonably high microclimatic humidity. The plants are usually sprayed daily, but often miss a day.

I always use reverse osmosis water, and I think that hard water would not work well in this arrangement as the whole principle of the setup depends on a high volume of evaporation, which with a heavily mineralized water supply would cause salt deposits and root burning. I believe that rain water or other water supplies with a low mineral content would also be effective. Fertilization consists of weekly applications of a hydroponic fertilizer (used to ensure proper calcium and magnesium levels) at

approximately 200 PPM. With this setup the plants grow well, sending their roots through and around the tree fern and down to the bottom of the clay pot where they often circle the inside of the pot several times. Flowering tends to occur mostly in the autumn, and moss grows vigorously on both the tree fern and the clay pot. The negative sides to this mechanism are the difficulty of obtaining tree fern, conservation concerns about using tree fern and I believe that problems will occur after several years when the tree fern decomposes. Currently I have had plants in this system for 4 years, and the tree fern shows no signs of decomposition, but I expect that it will occur in due course. Although my growing area is an enclosed sun room, the humidity frequently drops to the 30% levels, particularly on a hot summer day, and the *Comparettias* have shown no problems withstanding this dryness when growing as described. *Comparettias* require less light than *Cattleyas* for example - I regulate the light by keeping a close eye on the plants and if I see the leaves beginning to turn red during the spring and summer I rotate the tree fern so that it provides the plant with more shade. Typically then as the weather darkens in the autumn I rotate the plant back to obtain more light. Temperatures in the growing area are relatively cool, with winter night temperatures dropping to 10 degrees Celcius, however, I am not convinced that cool nights are a necessity as I have had *Comp. macroplectron* bloom in flask, in areas that did not drop below 18 degrees Celcius at night. It seems that if these plants are growing well enough to have the energy to bloom they don't require much encouragement - perhaps a result of their rather dicey natural habitat.

Other plants with similar needs may do well in this situation as well - to date I have only tried it with a *Isabelia virginialis*, which was not thriving. Since moving it to this new environment it has grown well although has not yet bloomed. I plan to try some of the *Masdevallias* that prefer a mounted situation in the near future.

In summary, if you can keep your *Comparettias* humid and moist while giving the roots the air they require, I believe you will find them enthusiastic growers that will reward you with brilliant displays of their colorful flowers. For further information on this genus, I would refer readers to an excellent interview of H. Phillips Jesup, appearing in the June 1986 American Orchid Society Bulletin.

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

2002

**February 8-9:** Central Vancouver Island Orchid Society, Country Club Center, Nanaimo, BC. Contact: Sue Christison, Email: CVIOS@shaw.ca "<http://www.hedgerows.com/Canada/clubbrochures/CVIOS.htm>"

**February 16-17:** Southern Ontario Orchid Society, Toronto Civic Garden Centre, 777 Lawrence Ave. E at Leslie St., Toronto, Ontario. "<http://www.soos.ca/>"

**March 9-10:** London Orchid Society Orchid Show, London. For show information: "<http://los.lon.imag.net/losshows.htm>"

**March 22-24:** The Canadian Orchid Congress Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Orchid Society orchid show. The Co-chairs are: Faithe Prodanuk - faithep@home.com, Tracey Thue - thue@sask.usask.ca

**March 23-24:** Orchid Society of the Royal Botanical Gardens, 680 Plains Rd., Burlington, ON. Contact: Jim Brasch at jbrasch@mcmaster.ca. Show chair is Alma Hasler 905-823-5285. "<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Recreation/osrbg.html>"

**April 4-7:** Victoria Orchid Society Orchid Show. It will be in the Student's Union Building of the University of Victoria. Contact: "Ingrid Ostrander" email: ifl@telus.net 250-652-6133 "<http://www.members.home.net/bearman1/>"

**April 5-7:** The Manitoba Orchid Society. Email: mosorchids@home.com "<http://members.home.net/mosorchids/Index.htm>"

**April 24-May 2:** The 17th World Orchid Conference is being held at Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. For information check "<http://www.orchid2002.com.my/>"

**April 27-28:** The Ottawa Orchid Society show, Nepean Sportsplex, 1701 Woodroffe Ave., Nepean "<http://www.ottawaorchidsociety.com/>"

**May 4-5:** The Vancouver Orchid Society at the main branch of the Vancouver Public Library, right downtown Vancouver. Regular charge is \$6, \$1 off with coupon. "<http://www.hedgerows.com/Canada/clubbrochures/VancOrchidSoc.htm>"

**COC Web Site - <http://www.CanadianOrchidCongress.ca/>**

**This newsletter may be found there.**

**Please send in your show information - date, location, contact, etc.**



news

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Editor: Jerry Bolce

The purpose of COC news is to inform members of the meetings, policies of the COC, to profile members, and to provide technical information regarding happenings, trends and techniques in orchid cultivation across the country and around the world.

We welcome your suggestions and contributions. Deadline for each issue is one month before the issue dates previously announced.

Recipients of this newsletter are strongly urged to pass a copy on to other members of their society

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