ORCHIDACEAE OF THE SOUTPANSBERG

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Available information

Between 1973 and 1979, at the request of the then Venda Homeland Herbarium, and with special permission from the Minister of Forestry & Water Affairs, I collected mainly epiphytic orchids in the Soutpansberg rain forests. Records of these should still be in the Venda Herbarium, wherever that is now kept.

It is noticeable that orchids of all species are far less common than they were then: whereas it was mostly possible to collect by just picking up plants on fallen branches that were about to become compost anyway, few plants are now noticeable. I can only ascribe this to wanton habitat destruction, illegal collecting and possibly wild fires that swept through the area.

Although common in the wetter areas, many species of particularly *Eulophia* and *Ansellia* are also commonly found, although not in numbers, in drier parts of the mountain range.

Summary statistics

At least 70% of the epiphytic orchids of Southern Africa occurred here in 1970 (see attached list). Many of these plants are considered endangered, vulnerable or indeterminate. I also found several species of orchid previously only known from Zimbabwe or Mozambique.

Major studies and publications

No comprehensive study has been done specifically on the species occurring in the Soutpansberg.

Few people have extensively collected in the Soutpansberg, due to limitations imposed by permits, but most orchid growers are prone to pinching the odd plant when the opportunity presents.

General references

BALL, J. S. 1978. Southern African Epiphytic Orchids.

HARRISON, E.R. 1972. Epiphytic Orchids of Southern Africa.

SCOTT-SHAW, R. 1999. Rare and Threatened Plants of KZN and neighbouring regions.

STEWART, LINDER, SCHELPE & HALL. 1982. Wild orchids of Southern Africa.

N. Hahn

Recommendations for priority studies required to fill any gaps identified

As it is relatively simple to grow epiphytic orchids in aseptic culture on nutrient jelly, it is recommended that application be made to the relevant authorities for allowing collection of ripe seed capsules. I have access to a small laboratory, and for about R 10 000 per year, a small nursery could be maintained to raise from 200–2000 seedlings per species for re-establishment in nature. If it is further allowed to sell surplus material legally to orchid clubs, the lab could be self-sustaining, and I'm quite happy to do the re-establishment of orchids by request in suitable areas as part of the Lepidoptera survey.

Terrestrial orchids generally only develop properly in association with the correct mychorhizal fungi. It is recommended that an appropriate study be undertaken with a

senior student at an appropriate Department at a University. I will lend my assistance and expertise.

"Hot Spots" of particular importance

The endemic *Mystacidium braybonae* is highly regarded as an attractive miniature that is not too difficult to maintain in cultivation. It is widespread in the Soutpansberg, but some exceptionally large forms have been noted through the years. These spots need identification, and higher protection status. Similarly, several *Aerangis* and *Ansellia* species are in demand for garden plants.

Any patch of rain forest harbors several species, and as they are non-invasive and non-parasitic, it should do no harm to establish high concentrations of plants in areas where they will be protected from fire, depredation by Man, and able to act as seed-banks for the future of the species.

A special orchid garden will also be established in the suitable areas on the farm "Arbor" once appropriate clearance has been obtained.

Annex 1: Species List

Orchidaceae

Acampe praemorsa (pachyglossa)
Aerangis somaliensis
Aerangis mystacidii
Aerangis verdickii
Angreacum chamaenthus
Angreacum sp. (Ball 1065)
Angreacum sacciferum
Angreacum conchiferum
Ansellia gigantean var *nilotica*
Bolusiella maudae
Bulbophyllum carinatum
Bulbophyllum ballii/*malawiensis*
Bulbophyllum maximum (*oxypterum*)
Bulbophyllum sandersonii
Bulbophyllum scaberulum
Bulbophyllum oreonastes
Cyrtorchis praetermissa
Cyrtorchis arcuata
Jumellea filicornoides
Microcoelia sp.
Mystacidium braybonae
Mystacidium gracile
Mystacidium venosum
Mystacidium caffrum
Mystacidium pusilum
Oberonia disticha
Polystachya fusiformis
Polystachya cultriformis (*gerrardii*)
Polystachya transvaalensis
Polystachya albescens ssp *imbricata*
Polystachya concreta (*tesselata*)
Polystachya concreta (*tesselata* ssp. *tricruris*)
Polystachya zambesiaca
Polystachya ottoniana
Polystachya pubescens
Tridactyle bicaudata
Tridactyle tricuspis