ISSN 1554-1169

The Native Orchid Conference
Journal

Volume 3(2)
April - May - June 2006

Volume 3, Issue 2

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Photo: Kelvin Taylor.....back cover

Native Orchid Conference Journal is published four times a year by the Native Orchid Conference, Inc., a non-profit [501(c)3] organization, as a service to its members. The organization is devoted to fostering the study, conservation, and enjoyment of orchids native to North America. Membership dues are $25, $30, and $35 for individuals, families, and international subscribers, respectively. Address inquiries about membership, back issues of this journal, and requests for copies of the bylaws to the Treasurer: Mark Rose, NOC, Inc., P.O. Box 29010, Greensboro, North Carolina 27429-9010, USA; nativeorchids@yahoo.com OR ncorchid@yahoo.com.

Editorial contributions and inquiries about publishing articles and requirements for manuscripts, illustrations, or photos for publication should be addressed to the Editor:

Dr. Jyotsna Sharma,
University of Florida
155 Research Road, Quincy, FL 32351; USA
jyotsna@ufl.edu

Wanted: The Elusive *Deiregyne confusa*

Stefan Ambs
Silver Spring, Maryland
ambss@mail.nih.gov

Several long lost orchids were rediscovered in the United States last year. You probably remember the story about the rediscovery of *Cranichis muscova* and *Ponthieva brittonae* in Florida, which was reported in this journal last year [NOCJ 1(2), 2004] by Russ Clusman and Mark Larocque. However, until recently little became known to native orchid enthusiasts that another lost orchid was also found for the first time in many, many years at Big Bend National Park in Texas. Betty Alex, Joe Sirotnak, and Allison Freeman who are with the National Park Service at Big Bend National Park had found two plants of an unknown orchid blooming in the high country of Big Bend in June of 2004. It may have been their luck that strong rainfall had returned to the region after many years of drought. With the help of Joe Liggio, the unknown species was identified as *Deiregyne confusa*, or Hidalgo ladies tresses (Figure 1; page 9).

This species had been collected only once, by J.A. Moore and J.A. Steyermark, in the United States. They found a plant on June 22, 1931, in Big Bend at an elevation of about 7500 feet and described the species as *Spiranthes durangenesis*. The orchid was also known to Barton Warnock who saw it after WWII, as Betty Alex recalled from a conversation with him, but this observation was not made known to other people. *Deiregyne confusa* is a common Mexican species but is exceedingly rare in the United States, and the plant is easily confused with *Deiregyne (Spiranthes) durangenesis*. Guess how it got its name.

Ron Coleman was one of the first who received the exciting news about the discovery of *D. confusa* and informed some of us about his plans to visit Big Bend in June of 2005. Cliff Pelchat, Mark Larocque, Dennis Horn, Bill Jennings, and I decided to join him on the strenuous journey into the high country of Big Bend. Joe Sirotnak and Allison Freeman generously offered to be our guides in the effort of catching a *D. confusa* in bloom. Mark, Dennis, and I met at the airport in El Paso and drove the 5 hour journey to the Chisos Mountain Lodge in Big Bend, where we met with Ron, Cliff, and Bill in the evening. The hike was scheduled for the next day, June 10, but Cliff and Ron decided to start their explorations a day earlier. Near a source of permanent water they found *Epipactis gigantea*, but it was not flowering. This orchid blooms in April and May but the surrounding oak woodlands harbor *Hexalectris* species, and indeed, they found *Hexalectris spicata* in bloom and *Hexalectris warnockii* in bud. Their findings were a good start for our quest to see *D. confusa*, and everybody became upbeat that it was a good orchid year at Big Bend.

Hexalectris spicata
Photo: Jyotsna Sharma

The next morning, we started our ascent to the high country for *D. confusa*. Allison had seen blooming plants about a week before and our hopes were high that we would see blooming plants. However, she told us that the year was not as good as the previous year, which had high rainfall in spring, and there was a chance that the plants may have faded quickly because of the lack of water. Hiking was difficult because the steep terrain at Big Bend will challenge even experienced hikers. After hours of hiking, we finally reached the first area that had plants of the orchid. A cluster of plants appeared, but none was in bloom. Mark, Ron, and Cliff recalled having seen the same plants a few years ago and mistakenly identifying these as *Dichromanthus cinnabarinus* because of the similar leaf structure. This large and beautiful orchid also has its home at Big Bend but usually blooms in September. From here, we hiked further and finally reached an area where *D. confusa* has its home, along with such other rarities like *Hexalectris revoluta* and *Hexalectris nitida*, *D. cinnabarinus*, and *Malaxis wendtii*. It took us not much longer to reach an area where Allison had seen several *D. confusa* plants in bloom about a week before. To our great disappointment, all plants were gone over with no flowers remaining. We eagerly took pictures of the fruiting plants but truly had no other option. At this point, there was little hope to see another blooming plant on our trip because deer had eaten the emerging stems of *D. confusa* at another location of the orchid. The party decided to split with some going back and some continuing to reach a location

where *H. revoluta* had been seen blooming in previous years. *Hexalectris revoluta* is known from the Big Bend and Arizona. It usually blooms in May and June. And on this day, we saw a good number of plants but unfortunately they either were gone over, or just dry and not photogenic.

With the group splitting into different parties, I started searching the steep mountain slopes for new plants of *D. confusa*. It was a desperate measure. The search was not fruitful at the beginning, but I managed to find one fruiting plant in exchange for several rockslides that took me down on a journey to nowhere. A little bruised and tired, I changed my plans and decided to hike further into uncharted territory where my chances to find a blooming *D. confusa* were slim. It should become the luck of the day that I found a single blooming plant of *D. confusa* in a soil pocket of rim rock, a typical location for this orchid. The plant had just one open flower (Figure 2; page 9)but it rewarded me for coming to Big Bend. I also managed to find *H. revoluta* blooming down in the canyon. Here, the plant still found the necessary moisture to stay in bloom. Tired but satisfied, I marked the location of *D. confusa*, and began my journey back. It took me hours to return to the lodge and tell the others about my find. Unfortunately, Ron and Bill already had left and did not hear the news, and Mark and Dennis were too tired to hike up again the next day. Only Cliff decided to take the journey back and found the *D. confusa* in bloom the next day.


Hexalectris revoluta
Photo: Ron Coleman

For Mark and Dennis, the deci-


Hexalectris warnockii
Photo: Ron Coleman

sion not to go back was not only about *D. confusa*. They also had a conflicting interest of seeing a blooming *H. warnockii* instead. Both had not seen it in prime bloom before, and the news from Cliff and Ron were encouraging that *H. warnockii* could be in bloom. Thus, we decided to visit the following day. It truly was worth the effort, and we were rewarded with two blooming plants of *H. warnockii* on the third day of our trip. We also saw several plants of *H. spicata* in peak bloom. It was a great ending to our trip and we returned satis-

fied to El Paso for our return flights to home. It should be mentioned that Big Bend does not only offer the adventure of finding rare orchids, it also has great scenery and nice lodging. I am sure all of us will return in another quest to find one of the orchid rarities at Big Bend, or to simply enjoy the desert.

Hexalectris nitida
Photo: Ron Coleman

Flower Fireworks in Northern Ohio

Tom Sampliner
University Heights, Ohio
TomSam265L@hotmail.com

After playing the early morning car shuffle and rendezvous, our motley crew of Joel, John, Phil, and Tom headed west out of Cleveland this warm, humid 3rd of July. We were bound for a state scientific preserve called Lewis W. Campbell, slightly west of Toledo. At the preserve we met up with Dan, who had obtained the mandatory entry permit.

Near the entrance gate we were greeted by a multi-stemmed welcoming committee featuring bright orange flowers of butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosus*). Despite a lax growth habit of many of the stems, this did not deter great interest from the insects. Butterflies and solitary bees were numerous and most conspicuous of all had to be the fritillaries. Just a short walk into the prairie we saw thin stalks holding aloft racemes of short tubular white flowers of the colic root (*Aletris farinosa*). Taller and more robust but not yet blooming were the tall coreopsis (*Coreopsis tripteris*). Stouter stalked with linear leaves and cylindrical flower heads hinting at the pink color to come were the blazing stars; this one was the spiked blazing star (*Liatris spicata*). We would not need to wait to see the fully open snapdragon-like flowers of a beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*). There also were plenty of one of the mountain mints (*Pycnanthemum virginianum*) to go around, but none were yet open.

In such a place it would be hard to ignore the fern species present. Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) was everywhere. In fairly good supply were royal and cinnamon ferns (*Osmunda regalis* and *Osmunda cinnamomea*, respectively). Being quite wet early in the season, the expected marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) was standing up straight at attention.

But enough of this; the real reason why we were here was to see and photograph the electric, neon pink of the grass pink orchid (*Calopogon tuberosus*; Figure 1). We were not disappointed. Each flowering stalk waved in the breeze with one to several hot pink flowers open. The color would make any sign company proud as these lit up even the most open sunny areas. Most had at least several of the bottom-most flowers in perfect bloom. Each flower has a nonresupinate lip which has a brush of white hairs emerging from a yellow spot. These hairs mimic pollen and play a deceitful game with insect visitors by promising a reward of nutritious pollen but in fact giving nothing - well, that is, except for a free amusement park ride. The lip is hinged at the base so when an insect (typically, bees) of suitable bulk weighs it down it throws the unsuspecting visitor upon its back. The bee then lands on the column below and the pollen is placed on the insect's back. Bees already carrying the pollen

Figure 1. *Calopogon tuberosus*.

thus contact the stigma and facilitate pollination in the process.

Before we knew it everyone had expended copious quantities of film or flash-card space. We were done here and bound to move on to other places. Nearby, a railroad right-of-way was briefly inspected. I knew it from some twenty years ago, but it has fallen upon neglect and no longer is home to some interesting prairie species.

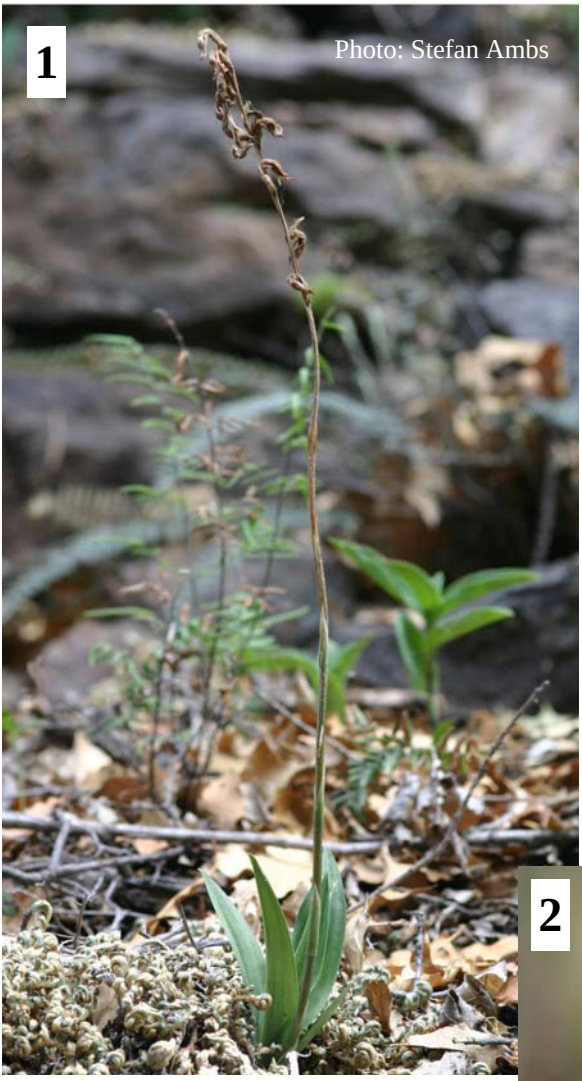
Next on our hit parade would be a visit slightly northward to The Nature Conservancy's property called Kitty Todd. Later in the year, I knew this was home to one of the few populations in the State for the yellow fringed orchid (*Platanthera ciliaris*; Figure 2). It was here today that we would enjoy our second encounter with the beautiful grass pinks. A word though about some of the other residents of this preserve. Our native prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) must have known we were coming as the many large ground hugging clusters were showing off their lemon yellow flowers to best advantage. Besides attracting a number of insects, the occasional touch of orange in some of the blossoms kept our cameras whirling. Clusters of native lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) were well represented. This plant is host to the rare Karner Blue Butterfly, and the plants bloom in Ohio during May. A couple more of the blazing star species were present. At this early stage my guess was *Liatris spicata*, *Liatris aspera*, and possibly *Liatris scariosa*. What I was certain about were the bright orange, widely flaring flowers of Michigan lily (*Lilium michiganense*). Dark brown spots dotted each petal surface, which was made more dramatic by a yellowish wash going deep into the throat. Most flowering stalks had at least one flower open along with one or more buds. Our timing could not have been better. Something pink besides the orchids had to be in bloom here. Sure enough, we caught some duller pink similar to common clover coming from wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*). Just as fascinating as the tubular pink flowers were the splotches of red on the uppermost leafy bracts just below the flower clusters.

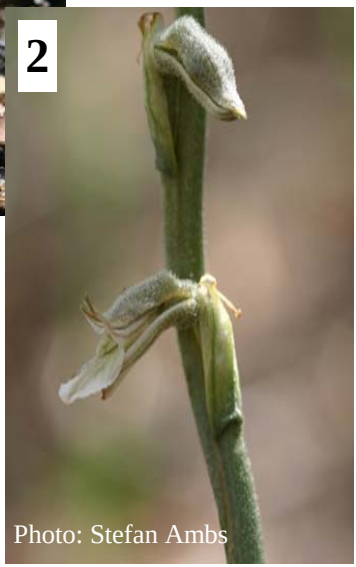
Figure 2. *Platanthera ciliaris*.

One hazard of each of these places has to be the often unseen thorns of roses blending in with the other vegetation. Needless to say, this is hard on the clothes and any exposed skin. In that regard, before entry, it is wise to take a liberal spraying of repellant to keep local irritants like flies, mosquitoes, and ticks at bay.

The day was fleeting by; surely we could force in another stop or two. Next would be the nearby state nature preserve called Irwin Prairie. If we were going in then there had to be an orchid present. Sure enough, right along the boardwalk were a few of the grass colored stalks and flowers of the northern tuberculed orchid (*Platanthera flava*; Figure 3). According to the authorities this would have to be variety *herbiola*. By this time, with heat and humidity having built up considerably, neither the fading light nor my energy level or other conditions warranted my getting out all the photographic equipment. Years ago this preserve was much wetter than what we saw today. Perhaps this visit was later in the season or water table has changed, or maybe this was just a dry year. In any event, wherever we looked, the substrate appeared too dry.

We had a choice to make now: either continue to explore in the greater Toledo area in the diverse Oak Openings at remnants of the Great Black Swamp, or travel back eastward to Pickeral Creek. Since the latter is home to an easily accessible population of the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid, the choice was





Figures 1 and 2 from 'Wanted: The Elusive *Deiregyne confusa*' by Stefan Ambs (page 1).

1. Plant of *Deiregyne confusa*.
2. Flower of *D. confusa*.

Facing page:

Figures 2 and 3 from 'Orchids in an Unexpected Place' by Kelvin Taylor (page 17).

1. *Cypripedium acaule*.

2. *Liparis liliifolia*.

This page:

Figure 2 and 3 to accompany 'A Tale of Three Orchids' by Hal Horwitz (page 14).

1. *Spiranthes magnicamporum.*

2. *Corallorhiza bentleyi*.


2
Photo: Kelvin Taylor


3
Photo: Kelvin Taylor

Figure 1 from ‘New Find’ by Mark Larocque (page 19).

Figure 3. *Platanthera flava* var. *herbiola.*

unanimous and easy. Orchid time it was. We headed toward Castalia but stopping only some ten-twelve miles west for the state wildlife area called Pickeral Creek. Hopefully it was neither hunting nor fishing season. After all, none of us was wearing orange nor were we collectors of spent shell casings. In the golden glow of the late afternoon sunshine briefly obscured by fast moving clouds, we searched for orchids in bloom. We were not disappointed. The peak count was year 1996 when some 5600 stalks were counted. The following year the population was down by some 3000 stems. Each year thereafter this finicky species has not bloomed in high numbers. In quite a few of the most recent years, the counts have been quite depauperate. For us orchid hunters, the couple dozen prime blooming specimens this year would do just fine. What character for the lower lip to be divided into three parts each deeply fringed! Hot white is contrasted with a soft greenish cast to the rear of the sepals and petals. The frontal aspect of the orchid flower looks to some folks as if they were looking at a person - perhaps an angel all dressed up in hot white. Here I resorted to some photographic gimmickry. The use of a dark black background made each flower or raceme of flowers just jump out at the viewer. This wetland-prairie alongside Sandusky Bay puts on quite an aerial show as well. Eagles, osprey, and other raptors swoop and bank overhead. If anyone had any film left after this, I am mystified. Now it was late. Light was fading and we were all hungry and tired. We stowed our gear in preparation for the two hours journey back home. What a day it had been. We surely enjoyed the flower fireworks on the third in preparation for the fourth!

A Tale of Three Orchids

Hal Horwitz
Richmond, Virginia
hal.horwitz@comcast.net

Orchidaceae is one of the largest plant families. The most recent estimates vary from 18,000 to 20,000 species worldwide. Although popularly thought of as tropical, these are found growing on every continent except Antarctica. The *Flora of North America* (2002) recognizes 208 species on the North American continent.

This is the tale of three Virginia orchids – three species recently found in our state for the first time. Virginia now boasts 58 orchid species among its flora. The manner in which each of these "new" orchids was found is instructive for all wildflower enthusiasts, especially orchid lovers, as we educate ourselves and, if we are lucky, make our modest contribution to the complex field of botany.

Some years ago, I was sitting in a classroom at the College of William and Mary listening to a Master's student report on his study of the flora of a section of Rappahannock River drainage in Lancaster County. The county, which is in an area of Virginia known as the Northern Neck, is on the coastal plain and borders both the Rappahannock River and Chesapeake Bay. The student's thesis had taken two years and involved choosing a well-defined area and going back season after season, recording every species found. Most of the species noted were routine, known to grow in the study area. However, I nearly came out of my seat when slides of *Cypripedium kentuckiense* (Figure 1; front cover) flashed on the screen. This largest and most wonderful of the lady's slippers in North America had never been found east of Kentucky before this discovery. An incredible colony of more than 400 plants had been located over 500 miles (800 kilometers) from its closest neighbor. It is the only known population of the southern lady's slipper (a.k.a. ivory lady's slipper) on the coastal plain. The plant grows up to 38 inches (97 centimeters) and the flower lip can measure 2 ½ inches (6.5 centimeters). The lip color varies from nearly white to ivory to pale lemony yellow as contrasted with the golden yellow of similar species. The lip opening is formed by margins that fold neither inward nor outward. Finally, the lip is not slipper-shaped either, but more like a rounded oval. *Cypripedium kentuckiense* became the 56th orchid for the state of Virginia.

A year later while I was visiting the VA Division of Natural Heritage, the State agency responsible for maintaining an inventory of rare native plants, animals and natural communities, their chief botanist showed me some satellite images of Virginia. These were color infrared photographs taken from space in winter,

when the trees are bare; this specialized view gave scientists new ways to evaluate land cover. Infrared images show soil as red, ponds as black, and exposed rock as blue. Since the underlying rock formations in this part of the state are limestone, the blue splotches among the predominant red on the map looked promising and begged further investigation. Perhaps these represented limestone barrens and harbored botanical communities unusual to Virginia.

All the promising-looking areas were on private land and it took some time to gain the approval of landowners to search their property. Another limiting factor was the location; the sites were all about 400 miles (over 600 kilometers) from the Natural Heritage offices and not close to any large town. Nearly a year later, after multiple visits in different seasons, an orchid new to Virginia, *Spiranthes magnicamporum*, (great plains ladies' tresses; Figure 2; page 10), a Midwestern species, was found growing on three of those "splotches on the map." This find was quite a shock, since the nearest known population was over 300 miles (500 kilometers) away.

The infrared images allowed a trained observer to discover limestone barrens eventually found to contain multiple elements of Midwestern prairie plant life. High-tech science had located Virginia's 57th native orchid.

Now let me tell you about our member, Stan Bentley, an amateur plant hunter from the western part of Virginia who loves native orchids. He has used every spare minute of the past quarter century walking the byways and trails of western Virginia and the adjacent West Virginia, botanizing. A few years ago, he ran across a little plant unknown to him in West Virginia, not a mile from the Virginia state line. What he saw was a stand of plants that looked for all the world like young, stout stems of *Corallorhiza maculata* var. *maculata* (spotted coral-root), an orchid flowering in the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia from mid to late July.

The two observations that eventually led him to examine the plants in much greater detail were: the flowers never seemed to open and the stems were thicker than those of spotted coral-root. It was obvious that this was a species he had neither seen before nor read about. He called Dr. John Freudenstein, the recognized authority of the genus *Corallorhiza*, who visited the site and confirmed the uniqueness of this orchid. According to Dr. Freudenstein, this orchid is similar to a Mexican species of coral-root, but quite unlike anything north of the Mexico-United States border. In December 1999, the plant, *Corallorhiza bentleyi* (Figure 3; page 10), was officially described in a botanical journal as one new to science.

In the intervening years, Bentley's coral-root has been located in several places in mountainous southwestern Virginia, adjacent to the original West Virginia site. In some locations the flowers never open fully and the lip is dark red,

while in others the lip is yellow and open. All discoveries of Bentley's coralroot to date have been in deciduous Appalachian forest on somewhat disturbed sites. Stan Bentley "contributed" orchid species #58 for Virginia.

I find these three stories interesting because of the lessons they teach: (1) there are still lots of botanical discoveries to make if you are persistent, if you use all the tools at your disposal, and if you stay inquisitive; and (2) just because something looks familiar from a distance does not guarantee that it is. Investigate anyway; it just might be something different. You may have been down that road previously, but you might have overlooked a rare plant or perhaps it did not bloom the year you searched. Do not assume that all botanical exploration is complete. There is still much to discover. And, imagine the thrill of finding a plant never described before!

When I was first getting involved in photographing wildflowers, one of my early mentors, an elderly man, would literally jump up and exclaim to the searched-for plant, "Wow, you're the most beautiful flower I've ever seen." At the time I thought it a little silly, but as time progressed, I came to appreciate his outbursts. His reaction was a wonderful expression of joy and a blessing that someone could maintain such enthusiasm and freshness of outlook throughout his or her life.

I invite you to join the hunt and maintain your persistence and enthusiasm. Delights await.

This article (or parts thereof) was originally published in Blazing Star*, the newsletter of the North American Native Plant Society.*

Corallorhiza maculata
Photo: Ron Coleman

Orchids in an Unexpected Place

Kelvin Taylor
Goldsboro, North Carolina
plantsman@yahoo.com

Back in 1997 a friend told me about some pink wildflowers she saw growing in a wooded area near her home. From her description I was quite intrigued. Considering the time of year, the habitat, and the fact that she described these something like an "orchid," I figured the only way to find out for sure was to go see for myself.

One Friday afternoon in mid-April of 2003 I traveled to Johnston County, NC and upon entering the subdivision where my friend lived, I noticed this was not a typical housing development. Yes, there were houses and green lawns, but most of the area was still forested and not clear-cut of all trees, which is sadly more common in developments these days. After arriving at her house we hiked a short distance up a paved road to a faint path leading into a thin pine forest surrounded on two sides by houses and on another by the road. Less than 30 ft into the woods, I spotted the first pink flowers of *Cypripedium acaule*. My friend commented that there were dozens more in bloom deeper into the woods. We didn't have to walk but a few more yards when the magic of spring came into light. Dozens of beautiful *C. acaule* were in perfect flower including one and only one albino (Figure 1; back cover). The flower stems were quite tall and flowers had a large labellum. Most were individual plants growing scattered throughout the forest floor, while others appeared as tight clumps of three to six plants (Figure 2; page 11).

The plants were growing so thick in this one section of the woods that it was difficult to walk without fear of stepping on a plant! A quick count tallied 82 plants in flower and approximately 12 more in the leaf stage. After taking some photos I took time to observe the habitat. At first appearance the area seemed too shaded for any angiosperm to get enough light to bloom, yet the orchids found it just perfect under the dark canopy of the pines. A few oaks were scattered throughout and by the size of the trees here I would guess the age of the forest to be about 20 to 25 years old.

Our next stop was another wooded lot nearby where more *C. acaule* were growing much shorter in height, but in similar numbers. These plants were growing in a younger pine forest under a more open canopy. I noticed the soil profile was distinctly different, too. Underneath the thin layer of pine needles was hard clay. It was very dry to the touch, yet it contained enough moisture for the plants to thrive. Other than a few lichens, very little vegetation was growing in this section of the woods. From this observation I concluded the soil was quite poor in nutrients. However, for the orchids it apparently was ideal habitat.

The last place we stopped was my friend's woodland natural area next to her house. Here the conditions were very different. Under the dense cover of some tall oaks were *Liparis liliifolia* in bloom (Figure 3; page 11). A colony of more than a dozen plants was putting on a show. This species prefers moist, rich soil as opposed to the drier conditions for *C. acaule*. Next to the collection of *Liparis* were a couple of *Goodyera pubescens* rosettes (Figure 4). Still a few months from blooming, the white veins in the leaves of this distinct species were easy to spot.

I was very excited about seeing so many wild orchids in bloom. This was not a location that I would have expected to see such a high density of plants. For now they are protected in a green zone right in the middle of an expanding development. Hopefully more residents will take notice of their botanical treasures and protect these special areas.

Figure 4. *Goodyera pubescens*.

New Find

Mark Larocque
Parkesburg, Pennsylvania
pesllc@comcast.net

While on business in southern GA in late September, I planned a trip to the roadside areas of Hwy 301 to look for seed pods of *Platanthera nivea.* I searched several nice road shoulders in areas that had several hundred plants the previous July. Unfortunately all I could find were a few pine lilies (*Lilium catesbaei*) and pitcher plants (*Sarracenia minor*). I stopped at one more 'orchid location' near Homeland, Charlton County, GA that Stefan Ambs had told me about. I was unable to locate any plants of *Platanthera nivea*, but to my surprise, I found three plants (past prime) of *Pteroglossaspis ecristata* (Crested Plume Orchid; Figure 1, page 12) going into seed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Capsules of *Pteroglossaspis ecristata*.

This is a new County record in Georgia for this plant. The plant was known from two other coastal counties (Camden and Brantley). The flowers had mostly gone over. The color of the flowers in this population appeared to be similar to the plants in Florida, having yellow sepals and a purple-brown lip. But, the plants at this location were smaller than in FL, measuring only 24 inches tall. The Florida plants can reach 5 feet. Although my search yeilded only three plants at this new site, there should be more plants nearby because suitable habitat exists. However, it was hard to pick them out at that time of day with the sun setting.

END NOTES

5thAnnual
Native Orchid Conference Meeting
June 9 –12, 2006

Southern Oregon University
Ashland, Oregon, USA

Ashland, Oregon is situated in the convergence of three mountain ranges. This unusual geological convergence gives rise to a unique and diverse flora which supports twenty-five native orchid species, fourteen of which typically bloom in June.

Field trips will be half-day and full day excursions led by area botanists. Trips are planned to Crater Lake, Illinois Valley, and the Russian River using transportation provided by university vans.

Details of conference registration and schedule is now available at the Native Orchid Conference website at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nativeorchidconference/.

GROWISER Preserve in northeastern Oregon
Photo: Andy Huber

The Native Orchid Conference, Inc.
P.O. Box 29010
Greensboro, NC 27429-9010

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