# Odontoglossum Alliance Newsletter

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# THE ODONTOGLOSSUM ASTRANTHUM COMPLEX

## By Stig Dalstrom

#### Part 1.

In a genus that is notorious for being difficult to classify and with species that are confusing to identify, some complexes are worse than others. This is natural. There exist some pleasant exceptions from this, however, such as Odontoglossum cirrhosum and O. nevadense, which really cannot be confused with anything else as long as they don't hybridize with related species. I am not familiar with any natural hybrids involving O. nevadense but there are several known cases that obviously involve O. cirrhosum, but let's leave them out of this article and get back to them at some other time. All I am going to say here is that natural hybridization seems to play a not insignificant role in this genus' evolution. One may ask why that is, and if this is just a freaky exception from the "cladistic rule", that hybrids either do not exist, and if they do, cannot have any influence on the speciation process because if that would be the case, the entire classification model "cladists" favor would be flawed. For those of us who have spent almost a lifetime with these plants, the existence of what have been proven to be natural hybrids is not difficult to except and need to be taken into consideration when we classify the species. This is also something that the taxonomists who rely on DNA sequencing for classification purposes should keep in mind. How does natural hybridization affect the computer models?

Anyway, the DNA problem in general is something we can get back to later as well. Here, we are going to take a look at what I call the "astranthum complex", which consists of a group of rather odd looking species, distributed from Colombia in the north to Bolivia in the south. Personally, I have always considered them, if not "true" then at least very closely related to the typical *Odontoglossum* species. The vegetative morphology, plant habit and ecology are basically the same. The only visible morphological difference can be found in the shape of the

"pollination apparatus"; the column-lip relationship. The column itself differs in most cases, from other species in the genus by a developed hood, or collar, around the anther cap. Bockemühl and Senghas referred to this characteristic feature when they established the genus *Collare-stewartense* (plants with a "Stewart collar") for these species. This is not a unique feature for this group of plants, however, and it can be seen in several other not closely related genera as well, such as *Caucaea* and *Trichopilia*. In addition, not all species in the complex has a collar, such as *O. povedanum* and *O. tenuifolium*. Actually, the only consistent feature that unites this group is the presence of projecting ventral column lobes. This feature is shared with *Cochlioda* and *Solenidiopsis* species, which are very closely related by the way.

There is one more species that should be mentioned here, which was described as *Oncidium aurarium* by Reichenbach. Schlechter, who did not have access to Reichenbach's types or herbarium at the time, re-described this species as *Odontoglossum trilobum*, and it has flip-flopped back and forth between these two genera ever since. When the DNA sequencing became established as a useful addition to more traditional classification tools, I was quick to incorporate it into my way of working, as a complement to morphology, ecology, anatomy etc. When all "lights" are green, it is a very good indication that an assumption about which species goes where is "on the money". It also helped justifying the separation of species, such as *angustatum* and *pardinum*, which really do not have anything in common with "true" *Odontoglossum* species, and to place them in *Cyrtochilum* where they have their closest relatives. I am a firm believer that molecular based classification is helpful, but in <u>combination</u> with primarily morphology. There are very simple reasons for this. First, we need visible evidence, or features, to be able to use taxonomy as a practical, user-friendly and realistic way to identify plants by looking at them. If we need a laboratory to be able to tell plants apart, the system becomes useless.

Second, and more important, the models and systems used in molecular work have flaws. Perhaps they are not many, but they are distinct and enough to raise serious question marks concerning the procedure. Odontoglossum/Oncidium aurarium constitutes a good example. I originally hesitated in placing this species due to obscure morphological features, but leaned towards treating it as an Odontoglossum related to the astranthum complex. When I received an out-print of an early DNA sequencing "tree" (cladogram) of plants in the Oncidiinae, performed by Norris Williams, Mark Whitten and others at the University of Florida in Gainesville in collaboration with Mark Chase, I was happy to see that my guess was correct. I therefore transferred this species to its correct name; Odontoglossum aurarium. Some years later, and in a revised DNA tree, this species has disappeared. When mentioning this to Steve Beckendorf, who has discussed the value of molecular based taxonomy with Mark Whitten, I was told that Odontoglossum aurarium apparently was no longer an Odontoglossum. As a matter of fact, it was misplaced altogether and did not belong in the astranthum complex at all but rather with some other Oncidium species. Now, this may have been alright if we had based the original decision on morphology alone, but we did not. It was based on "irrefutable" molecular evidence. It seems the "irrefutability" designation was somewhat premature. How can this be? Did the DNA lie? Or was there an error in the process? A human mistake? A misidentified specimen? I have not been able to confirm this but whatever happened to O/O aurarium highlight some of the problems with this process.

Returning to the *astranthum* complex, the latest DNA tree that I have access to (I have not seen the one in Genera Orchidacearum, if there is one) shows that this group is a "sister group" to the other and traditionally better known *Odontoglossum* species, which was not so

hard to imagine based on morphological studies. We can also see that Odontoglossum povedanum is a fundamental "sister" species to the rest of the entire group, or clade (branch). What is interesting is that apparently Odontoglossum tenuifolium is then a sister species to all the other ones in that clade (one step up the ladder). In other words, O. povedanum and O. tenuifolium seem to represent more "primitive" stages of the evolution of these orchids. If we remember that both these lack anther hoods we may conclude that this particular feature developed after the division from the "true" Odontoglossum species took place (povedanum going one way and the rest going another). Consequently, most of the other species "above" tenuifolium that "follow" in the DNA based evolutionary ladder have an anther hood, except the species in *Solenidiopsis*. Based on the cladogram, this latter clade seems to have evolved at a stage where Cochlioda and the rest of the astranthum complex also took on separate evolutionary paths. Hypothetically, we could speculate that the hood developed along a line of taxa after they had left Solenidiopsis behind (or aside). Apparently this feature is something that can pop up spontaneously at different stages and in different clades in the Oncidiinae, and does not necessarily indicate a close relationship. But if we base our speculations on the DNA cladogram that I have, we can speculate that the astranthum complex evolved from yellow and brown flowered species, with column lobes but without an antherhood. Then the hood came but the flowers were still yellow and brown. From this complex, a group with colorful flowers developed that adapted to a different pollination syndrome (presumably hummingbird pollinated), which later let the stigma become bilobed for some reason. A bilobed stigma is also something that can be seen in Solenidiopsis, and in Oliveriana and Systeloglossum as well (the latter two genera not being closely related to the *Odontoglossum* clade). So obviously we have another feature that has evolved independently in different clades. But the development of a bilobed stigma (by the intrusion of the rostellum), speaks against our hypothesis that Cochlioda came from the astranthum complex and suggests that Solenidiopsis may in fact be dull colored Cochliodas, that have lost the anther hood...? And there we are with our pants at the knees.

If we accept that the entire *povedanum* clade (including the *astranthum* complex, *Cochlida* and Solenidiopsis) is on a separate path from the rest of the genus Odontoglossum, the question remains how to treat them. Personally, I am a firm believer that molecular analysis is helpful in plant systematics (what is related to what), but should not be dominating the taxonomic process (what we are going to call the distinguished taxa). I would prefer to maintain the entire povedanum clade in Odontoglossum simply because they look more like "odontoglossums" than anything else. They are also so closely related that we can keep them there if we want to. The problem with that decision is what to call the "later" evolved species that we have placed in separate genera, such as Cochlioda and Solenidiopsis. Shall we include them in Odontoglossum as well, which is possible, or do we want to maintain them as separate genera based on various visible features? Traditionally, this would not have created any problems but nowadays we are dealing with a different set of nomenclatural rules, to a great extent created by scientists using molecular work as a foundation for their classification principles. I have problems with some of these rules. For instance, if we accept one species, or clade, as being a separate genus then the other "sister" species, or clade, regardless of how many it includes or what they look like, also has to become a separate genus at the same level. I don't agree with this. We are talking about a theoretical and superficial decision here that does not represent reality, necessarily. Let's say that we agree that one monophyletic clade is so well defined that it can readily be distinghuished from its sister clade, then we should be able to treat it as a separate genus, provided that all the species in that clade come from the same ancestor (a monophyletic clade). The sister clade, however, may include any number of species and complexes

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that with time develop in different directions, establishing their own definable clades at different levels that can be separated into distinct genera. But this we cannot do according to the rules. They have to be treated as one single genus no matter what they look like, and this causes taxonomical problems like to one we have in the *povedanum clade*. To me this seems unmotivated, rigid and superficial. If, as an alternative, we allow *any* monophyletic clade <u>at</u> <u>any level</u> that contains species that share a unique combination of features, or are convincingly definable as a natural group one way or another, to be accepted as a distinct genus, things become more flexible and user-friendly. Then we could accept the entire *Odontoglossum* clade as a distinct genus, where *Solenidiopsis* and *Cochlioda* have evolved further on their own paths and are definable as monophyletic clades on their own, and thus can be separated as distinct genera (if we prefer that). After all, what is a "genus" anyway, other than a group of monophyletic taxa that share a unique combination of features?

It boils down to a choice between rigid and superficial "rules" versus user-friendly "common sense" in my opinion. We also need to keep in mind that rules and laws in general often are created to serve the rule-makers purpose. That is why the judicial body of a nation has to be separated from the governing body. I am fully convinced that the plant systematics' rules are created in an attempt to make classification and taxonomy both biologically natural and easier. Unfortunately, this has not become the result and I suggest that we re-examine the rules now when we have some years of experience of trying to follow them. Constant revisions of any given rule system should be acceptable, particularly when the rules provide more problems than they solve.

What makes the entire situation even more fun and frustrating at the same time, is that molecular based classification leaves many options available that are equally "right". Depending on your particular preference you can follow a broad generic and specific concept (being a "Lumper"), or making every single clade a separate genus, wherever possible (being a "Splitter"). In many cases we also see the works of those who lump other scientists work and split their own (being a "Splimper"). This is unfortunately only human and part of who we are.

To be continued...

Note: Color illustrations are on page ----

## Conservation......of old Odontoglossum Alliance hybrids.

#### by Andy Easton

Forgive me if I do not lose any sleep over the conservation of species orchids. In my experience most of the so-called endangered species are about as endangered as the world is from global warming! I used to read about how Odm. crispum was at risk of extinction in Colombia and believed it, until I went there myself and saw them being grown in the thousands for cut flower production near Bogota. Now I also learned that they can be grown superbly with purple foliage so long as the leaf temperatures remain temperate but that is another story. Basically, the people writing this nonsense in books had no knowledge of the real orchid world and in many instances were just repeating what some other ill-informed orchidist had written.

But I believe we are facing a much more serious conservation issue in this group of orchids that we love and that is the maintenance, in good health, of some of the old hybrids. I remember the time in the 1970's when I used to go to England and poke around nurseries like Stonehurst, Keith Andrew Orchids and Mansell and

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Hatcher, finding old treasures that sometimes I could persuade them to sell a piece from. One of my best days was at Stonehurst when I arrived to find that Bert White had been taken ill and that the grower Alan Mauries (sp?) would show me around,

Back then it was still acceptable to bring cartons of duty-free cigarettes and I had been dishonest and brought several. With one left and nobody to give them to, I was happy to donate the carton to my genial host. Ian had been in orchids for many years and knew Odonts well. I would ask about this and that and he would usually comment that maybe Mr. White would not want to sell it. I would point out that I could see at least 2-3 propagations and eventually he would relent and I accumulated quite a pile of what essentially had been backbulb propagations.

I had come down on the train from London and Ian offered to bare-root all the plants and deliver them up to my hotel the next day. I decided that was way too risky so I made up two large boxes to take back on the train with me. We enjoyed a pleasant meal at a local pub, I paid what I considered a very reasonable bill for what essentially were priceless plants and headed back to the city. It was a bit of a hassle to get the plants down to Dorset and bare-rooted and inspected before I returned to the USA but I knew, confirmed by Keith too, that I had a great haul. Among the plants I bought was the legendary Vuylstekeara Lutetia 'Stonehurst' FCC/RHS as well as some of the finest Odm. pescatoreii line of hybridizing such as Odm Pescalo 'Stonehurst'. That was a particularly good trip as I also came home with a piece of the enchanting Oda Shelley 'Spring Dress' AM/RHS. There are no more Charlesworth's, Mansell and Hatcher, Low's, Armstrong and Brown or even Keith Andrew Orchids. Stonehurst has ceased as an orchid nursery and many of the better hobbyist collections in England are no more. The Eric Young Foundation continues but without any knowledge of how to actually use any of the older breeding plants that might still be in their collection. I am told that they have no contact with Alan Moon whatsoever. Jealousy methinks! Tim Brydon's wife is no longer flying to London as a stewardess and bringing back treasures and indeed, there are few Odont. treasures left in all of England to bring back. Which leads me to the point of all this. Many of the old and significant Odontoglossum Alliance breeding plants have ended up in California. Howard Liebman, Tom Perlite, Tim Brydon, Bob Hamilton and maybe a few other folk maintain many of them in their collections but age and time is an enemy to us all. There does not seem to be any bright-eyed new enthusiasts who are bugging us to part with divisions. What bugs me also is that keeping these old plants is akin to having lots of valuable books in a library. The only value is when the books are read or when the orchids are used to make new or to expand existing breeding lines. As I see it, those of us lucky enough to enjoy owning these special plants also have a serious responsibility to try and ensure they survive and even hopefully thrive. It does not matter too much with Oda. Heatonsis 'Plush', for it has been around since 1906 and could lay claim to being a real weed. I wondered why I have made so many intergeneric hybrids with it and then the reality hit me. It is essentially almost continuously in bloom, surely one of the most desirable traits for any orchid. Yet it really took the genius of Keith Andrew to see value in its breeding potential, all this nearly 70 years after it first appeared on the scene. Too see Bob Hamilton's exciting new Oda. Prince Voltan is to see an obvious cross, totally ignored by all the experts at Charlesworth's etc up until Bob, possibly inspired by Keith's cross of Oda Shelley, decided to make what to me was an obvious primary and even better, treat it with oryzalin to make some tetraploids. We have available to us parents as diverse as Odtna. Bleu-ardent, Vuyls. Cambria 'Plush' (original), Oda Florence Stirling, Odm Quistrum 'Lyoth Angelo' and tetraploid remakes of Oda. Bradshawiae and Oda

Charlesworthii. None of the originals is younger than 60+ years since registration and the possibilities for new hybrids and new approaches to old hybrids are almost endless. If one looks back at nurseries like Charlesworth and Company, it was obvious why they went broke. They became poor growers, their plants were very inbred and they totally failed to make any transition to modern culture with proper fertilization

and light levels that were conducive to strong growth and plant increase. They deserved to fail but sadly, in doing so, many of their breeding plants were lost despite the best efforts of people like Eric Young to save them. As members of the Odontoglossum Alliance we have a duty to grow, show and promote this lovely group of plants. We have a responsibility to keep valuable antique varieties in cultivation wherever possible and we should be using (or allow others to use) our best plants to make exciting new hybrids. I do not believe the English in any way tapped the potential of this group and use as my inspiration for this view two friends. One,Gerardus Staal has that wonderful "what if?" approach to hybridizing and he has done some amazing hybrids that please me immensely both for their beauty and the pathways that they open. The other is Bob Hamilton, a true friend of anyone who enjoys a beautiful Odont. who has, as the result of his little-heralded work with colchicine and more recently, oryzalin, given us incredible tools to elevate the group to new and loftier heights.

Andy Easton March 14, 2010

#### Odontoglossum Alliance Meeting.

The Odontoglossum Alliance was held this year 26-28 February 2010 at the time of the San Francisco Orchid Show. The meeting was a joint meeting with the Pluerothalid Alliance. The San Francisco show was shortened this year. The opening preview, a wine and hor d'oeurves affair that used to be on Thursday night has been replaced by a Gala on Friday night. The show opened for visitors all day on Friday. I did not attend the Gala but instead covered the show on Friday afternoon. The show and sales area seemed to be about the same size. The variety of flowers in the show was not as diverse as in previous years. It seemed to me that there was a great deal of commonality in the display and exhibits. I assume this was from the displays produced by some of the sales companies. To have a sales booth you had to also provide a display. I thought there were many block purchases of flowering plants from the Far East or Hawaii to fulfill the requirement. There were some nice exhibits produced by a number of the local societies. I felt that displays by individual growers were sparse. I did not see many Odont alliance flowers in the displays. For the most part there were few Odont alliance flowers that were outstanding and/or memorable. Steve and Cindy Beckendorf had a display of some lovely alliance flowers. All in all I thought the displays somewhat disappointing. The sales area was another story. In the sales area the diversity seemed to be greatly increased. There was plenty of opportunity to acquire many one of a kind orchid specie. If you were looking to add species to your collection that were seldom seen this was your opportunity. One of the booths was selling the New Zealand bark. Several growers in our alliance, growing in the San Francisco area, have been using this bark. The bark is much harder than our US bark and they claim that they can use it for two years before repotting. The bark was selling for about \$10.00 for a 1.8 cubic foot bag. When I returned home I priced this bark from a California shipper and it came to about \$35.00 per bag. Out here on the East Coast, so far, no one is carrying it in bulk where this price could be reduced. I did acquire a few plants potted in NZ bark and am growing them here in Westport, Massachusetts.

Saturday morning several Odont and Pluerothalid members descended on the greenhouses of Bob Hamilton, Tim Brydon and John Leathers where all were greeted and given free run of the large greenhouse. John Leathers is probably one of the best Pluerothalid growers in the US. His bench ran the 100 foot length of the greenhouse. I saw a number of members departing with boxes of Masdevallias and Draculas. Tim Brydon has a bench about 50 feet long. Tim is a superb grower of odonts and he had a large number in bloom. Unfortunately Tim had to work and could not attend. Bob Hamilton showed his diversity with the Alliance with many new crosses and a good display of some beautiful odonts. He put in the auction a Solenodiopsii tigroides, a member of the Odontoglossum Alliance. This small plant about 4 inches high had a lovely branching spike of flowers that were very fragrant. In this newsletter is a photograph of the flower. A lucky and aggressive bidder at the auction ended up with this unusual plant. People would wander among Bob's collection to learn more about his wonderful and creative work. More often than not when they would admire a plant he would find a division for them. He is very generous and very hard to reciprocate even close to equal. Bob is very generous and several people departed with interesting odonts. By noon the visit was pretty much over and people left to visit the show or other interesting events and places in the city. I and Howard Liebman took the opportunity to visit the Art Museum.

We had arranged to have a pot luck dinner on Saturday evening in the Firehouse which is adjacent to the orchid show building at Fort Mason. This dinner was a team effort of the San Francisco Odont Alliance and the Pluerothalid Alliance. They had apparently done this before. Bob Hamilton and John Leathers produced a roast turkey breast with gravy and a 24 pound ham. Others brought hor d'oeurves, salads, appetizers, vegetables and dessert. The OA and others brought a large supply of wine. About 50 people attended. Of great interest was the attendance of several of the vendor personnel who were known by either alliance. They added greatly to the evening and enjoyed the diversion from the local scene. This was planned partly for convenience but also for economic reasons. It was a great success. First it was close with parking available as the show closed at 6 PM. Thus one could attend the show in the late afternoon and walk over across the tracks, less than 50 feet to the Firehouse. The venue in the Firehouse worked out very well. First there was a generous room for the diner preparations, hor deuvres and wine. Then a room that I guessed would hold upwards of 100 people for the dinner and meeting. I think we had a few more than 50 at our meeting. Since we had buffet service it was quick and easy. There was plenty of time for pre-dinner conversation with generous amounts of libration and nibbles. Dinner service was fast and easy. The meeting got started much earlier than our usual meetings, giving us plenty of time for two interesting talks. A lady from Colombia, S.A. gave a fascinating talk on a large number of Pluerothalids, of which I know very little. She had excellent visual material and lots of it. Even with all she had to show and tell, the talk was concluded well within the allotted time. Next Steve Beckendorf talked about the breeding with Odontoglossum crispum and especially the line breeding. Steve's visual material will be published in the August newsletter. The only business of the night was when I was surprised to receive 3 seedlings of Odm. Tribbles X Oda. Burning Bed which they registered as Oda. John Miller. I was surprised and honored. Bob Hamilton had made the cross and Andy Easton had raised the plants. The flowers are a brilliant red on a nice stem with good form on the first bloom. Bob had made the Tribbles cross. I had been thinking of re-running in the newsletter the article published in 1988 written by Brian Ritterhausen on the History of Odontoglossums in Great Britain. As I re-read it I noticed Brian commented that attention should be paid to Odm. trilobum and use in hybridization. Bob crossed Odm. trilobum with noble to produce Tribbles. It has been used quite successively both by Bob and Tom Perlite to produce some interesting flowers. For me it grows quite well and does not seem to suffer as much during the July and August period here in Massachusetts.

Then followed the auction where we shared the stage with the Pluerothalid Alliance. We had 25 items donated for our part and the Pluerothalid group had a similar number. We took turns auctioning the material and our Odontoglossum Alliance netted \$905.00. I thought it very successful.

All-in all I thought having the meeting in San Francisco worked out very well. I had hoped that we would

have more OA members make the trip even as we tried to make it as reasonable cost-wise as we could. The Cymbidium Society holds it meeting at the same location every year. They have a bigger draw then we do, but people get used to knowing the location and the ins and outs of the same place. There is something to be said for that. I know it is good to get to other places to see what is being grown in our Alliance. The meeting in Medellin, Colombia in August 2009 was wonderful. Interesting city, a great orchid show, several nurseries to visit and opportunities to buy plants. That is the essence of where we seem to like to meet. So when we choose where to go it these criteria that are matched up with the expense and the maximum number of attendees. It with the attendees that you learn. There are several places we could schedule our meeting for 2011. I hope people will speak out with their suggestions. My email is always open. (jemiller49@aol.com)

John E. Miller

Editor

#### Birds and Flowers Orchid Show in Medellin, Colombia

The famous Medellin Orchid Show in conjunction with the Birds and Flowers Day will be held August 1-8, 2010. The schedule for the show is as follows:

Setting up of stands: Sunday and Monday August 1 and 2, 8:00 a.m. to 6: p.m.

Judging: Tuesday, August 3, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. judging

Inaugural Cocktail Party, Tuesday, August 3, 7:00 p.m.

Show opened to public:

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday

Saturday, Sunday August 4-8

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Orchid Auction Thursday August 5, 7:00 p.m.

7 August National Holiday and the day of the flower parade. This parade may be held the 8<sup>th</sup> as at that moment the new President of Colombia will be starting his term.

Monday, August 9, 2010, taking down of exhibits.

In August 2008 the Odontoglossum Alliance and the Pleurothallid Alliance held a joint meeting in Medellin in conjunction with the show and parade. About 34 members attended and all reports were very positive. The show was great, many tours of greenhouses plus fine food and hotels.

This year a contingent of Odontoglossum Alliance members are planning on attending. Jim Rassmann is the OA leader. Bob Fuchs has been appointed to chair the AOS judging. Potentially Tom and Luanne Etheridge are also planning on attending. If any member is planning on attending I urge you to communicate with either Jim Rassmann (rassmann541@msn.com) or Juan Felipe Posada in Medellin (jfposada@estra.com.co).

# The Structure of the Odontoglossum Alliance I need help from a volunteer

Currently the Odontoglossum Alliance is registered in California in 1992, December 31, As a NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. I think it is a charitable trust. However we do not have a US/IRS registration. As such with our bank accounts the Odontoglossum Alliance operates at the bank under my name: John E.Miller DBA. As such it is taxable to me. Now the tax consequences are very minor and not a problem. It would be good to have our Alliance as a registered Non Profit organization. What I need is help from one or more of our members to have us registered with the US Government and particularly with the IRS to achieve official and recognizable status.

If there is a member or two who knows the ways to do this and would be willing to contribute his/her time and effort to get it registered they would be helping our Alliance. If they could contact me either by e-mail (jemiller49@aol.com), by phone (508-636-8409) or by mail (PO Box 38, Westport Point, MA 02791) then I could send you copies of what I have and work with you to accomplish this needed organization.

#### Dues Notice and Voting

In your newsletter this time is an envelope which is provided for both dues payment and voting. I hope by providing this it will be easier and faster for all to respond for both items. In your envelope is a mailing label that shows your address. It also shows the date your dues have been paid through. If the date says **"Dues Paid Through 05/10"** then you need to pay your dues before 1 August 2010. You may pay for one year @ \$15.00 or for two years @ \$30.00. IF the label has any other date on it than **05/09 or 05/10** then **NO** dues payment is required. I remind you that I can only accept checks drawn on a US bank or cash.

Included with the newsletter is a ballot for the election of offices. Please use the same envelope for voting.

Correct any errors on the label by entering them on the envelope in the appropriate place. I would ask you to also enter your email address in the indicated place. If we have recently communicated via email you need not do this as I have your correct address.

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#### Odontoglossum harvengtense A Rant on AOS Judges By James Rassmann

Odontoglossum harvengtense is a natural hybrid of Odm. crispum x Odm. spectatissimum [triumphans] appearing where the species overlap in the Colombian Andes. This same natural hybrid also appears in Sanders Hybrid List synonymously as Odm. harvengtense, excellens and loochristiense. Under these names *Hermans Index of RHS Orchid Hybrid Awards 1841 – 2002* lists eighteen awards with images. Apparently, over time, the accepted name for harvengtense was somewhat muddled and awards were granted under the different names including Odm. excellens, long accepted as Odm. nobile (pescatorei) x spectatissimum (triumphans). There are no AOS awards to this cross under any of these names.

As the included RHS award images attest, Odm. harvengtense's form, shape and color can be extremely variable based most likely on the particular parental clones of crispum and spectatissimum. Steady improvement over time of RHS awarded clones of harvengtense might indicate that better examples of crispum and triumphans were used as parents in subsequent remakes of the hybrid. Later RHS award images of Odm. harvengtense "Pitt" and "Wyld Court" may also indicate that the fuller Pacho form of Odm. crispum was used in those plants.

Tracking down the source of my Odm. harvengtense "South Cove" was hit and miss, but so far it appears that it originated from Juan Felipe Posada at Colomborquideas and was sent to me several years ago as "packing material" among a shipment of other orchids. Juan Felipe tells me that this Odm. is his cross number CAL580 (Odm. spectatissimum [especial] x Odm. crispum Pacho [buena forma] ) made in 1996. This is certainly a primary hybrid worthy of several remakes.

I believe that many of us with an interest in Odontoglossums realize that relatively few Odontoglossums and related genera ever find their way to the AOS judging tables and that what does appear often gets short shrift there. Most of us also recognize that very few AOS judges are at all familiar with Odontoglossums and wouldn't recognize a good one if it jumped out and bit them in the throat. While true this shouldn't come as a surprise recognizing that when confronted with the unknown many judges fear making a mistake or exposing their lack of knowledge. What's worse most judges wouldn't dream of admitting their lack of knowledge and asking for guidance when appropriate.

This, I feel, was the case recently with an example of Odm. harvengtense which I submitted for judging in the PacNW Judging Center. Based on the image of harvengtense "South Cove" you might agree that it was deserving of recognition. Yet it didn't elicit a nomination for judging and no comment what so ever. Privately, I was told later by one participating judge that the judges "...didn't know what it was and didn't know how to deal with it." It would seem that all too often this is the case with Odontoglossums in AOS judging. I recall an example some years ago at an Oregon orchid show where exhibitors prepared an incredible Odontoglossum table display of very high guality plants. Interested in how the plants would be viewed by the judges I held back and observed as judge after judge viewed the submitted plants with apparent interest yet passed them by without one nomination and no discussion. More than a little irked I then nominated every plant myself. As I prepared the necessary paperwork the Judging Chair came up to me and whispered, "If you nominate all these plants we'll never get out of here today." Once nominated the plants went out to several teams and garnered three AM's and four or five HCC's. One plant, which in my opinion deserved an FCC, did, in fact, receive 86 points. Following judging I asked why no one had nominated any of these plants and only one judge replied, saying, "I didn't want to stick my neck out." Perhaps we ought to judge our chosen genera ourselves.

#### Request for Pictures and information

In this issue Dr. Wally Thomas sent in two pictures of plants in his solar greenhouse. Jim Rassmann sent in two pictures of Odm. Harvengtense. Those later two pictures prompted the writing by Jim of some explanation and discussion which you see in his article in this newsletter.

I invite every member to send in pictures for publication in the newsletter. When an award is earned for an Alliance flower, you have a spectacular plant, you have bloomed something new, anything that interests you – make it available to all our members. Chris Purver of the EYOF has promised me a picture of a spectacular Miltoniopsis that will be in the Chelsea show this month. I am looking forward to seeing it and putting it in the August newsletter. So share your joy and your events. With photos and stories. I am always looking for material Please help.

John Miller

Editor

## **Election of Officers**

It is time for the Odontoglossum Alliance to conduct an election of Offices and Board of Director members. Both Mario Ferrusi and Tom Etheridge who have served respectively President and Chairman of the Board are heavily committed to activities with the American Orchid Society and requested not to continue in those roles. The Odontoglossum Alliance also wishes to thank the outgoing Board members; Chris Purver, Roger Williams and Howard Liebman, for their service.

The following slate is presented to the members for election to office:

President	Steve Beckendorf
Vice-President	Bob Burkey
Chairman of the Board	Bob Hamilton
Board of Directors	Mario Ferrusi
	Tom Etheridge
	Larry Sanford
	Russ Vernon
	Carol Zoltowski
	Juan Felipe Posada
	Guido Deburghgraeve

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Included with this mailing is a ballot with this slate on it and an ability to write in candidates of your choice. Also there is an Odontoglossum envelope for you to use to return your ballot as well as dues if that is required. We will announce the results of the election in the August newsletter. Ballots not returned by that time will not be counted.



Odm. hervenglenee "Pill" AMLRI-6 1919



Two views of Odm. herverglence "South Cove"



Odm. harvenglenen: "Wijki Court" AlLIRHS 1930



Odm harvengtense





Odm. harvenglense "Hyeanum" AMRHS 1899 Exhibited as Odm. excellens then recorded as loochristiense ihen amended ib hanenglense

Odm. loochristiense "Anddarroch" AMIRHS 1905 Award painting listed as hanenglense.



Odm. loochisteree "Entiederee" AWRI-IS 1902



Odm. harvenglense "Crayshayanum" AMARI-6 1911



Odm. harvengtense Jim Rassmann's plant

#### May 2010







Odm tenuifolium

Odm povedanum

Cda vulcanica



Odm arisii





Odm dracoceps

Solenidiopsis tigroides



Odm astranthum

## May 2010



Odm micklowii



Odm multistellare



Odm tenufolium



Dr. Wally Thomas Greenhouse