



A Brief History

PETER TOBIAS

THE ORCHID CONSERVATION Alliance (OCA) was founded in 2006 as a California corporation and a 501(c)3 federal tax-exempt organization by Peter Tobias, Ron Kaufmann, and Steve Beckendorf. Tobias and Kaufmann had significant experience with the San Diego County Orchid Society's (SDCOS) Conservation Committee and Beckendorf was on the American Orchid Society's Conservation Committee. We all felt that the orchid community was not doing what it could for orchid conservation. So, without anything more formal, we decided to give it a try. We decided that we would try to develop a membership of similarly concerned orchid growers. In this regard, Harold Koo-powitz, then the editor of the *Orchid Digest*, was very helpful by allowing us to insert a recruiting brochure into an issue of the *Digest*. Harold accompanied that with a fairly passionate editorial urging people to join our nascent OCA. Along the way, we added Rosario Almeida Braga, then the president of the Rio de Janeiro orchid society and its newsletter editor, as well as Mary Gerritsen as directors. Rosario has since resigned but continues her conservation work in Rio de Janeiro. We currently have a mailing list of about 525 individual members as well as about 25 orchid societies.

We decided that our focus would be raising money to conserve land in orchid-rich regions of the world. There are five basic steps to creating a reserve: finding a desirable location, finding an owner willing to sell, finding the money to buy the land, arranging security, and finding long-term management. To date, we have only worked in South America because we know people there with whom to work.

So far, we have found "word of mouth" to be the

most useful for finding locations with lots of orchids worth preserving. Field biologists with experience and an interest in orchids know where orchid-rich sites are, and they know whether the orchids there are rare, novel, and endangered. This approach has worked well in Ecuador, Brazil, and Colombia. We have performed a formal analysis of the distribution of orchids in Ecuador, but this analysis has yet to bear fruit.

Finding an owner willing to sell his or her land has not yet been a problem. In most instances, the land where orchids are still plentiful is also land that is not well suited for agriculture or other development and, given an economic opportunity to divest of unproductive land, owners have been cooperative.

Finding the money to purchase land is always a challenge. However, it must be noted, with gratitude, that our membership has been very generous and, so far, we have met our fundraising goals. Furthermore, we have been very fortunate to find a partner, the Rainforest Trust, which has matched one-to-one our donations.

Guards are hired to provide security because of a variety of threats. Orchids are stolen by collectors, and logging of the trees where the orchids grow degrades the reserve. Another problem is that many countries allow homesteading. Land that is not "productive" can be occupied and owned, after some years, by a squatter who makes the land productive. Most countries now have legal mechanisms for preventing this.

The most difficult aspect of creating a reserve is ensuring its long-term survival. There is no point in creating a reserve that will be abandoned after 50 years. To that end, we work with local conservation institutions that will outlive any individual. Such institutions might



Lepanthes culex found in Selva de Ventanas Natural Reserve in Colombia.

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be a university or a conservation foundation. Ensuring sustainability led us to conclude that the OCA should not be the entity that owns the reserves. The OCA has no personal presence in any foreign country that would allow us to accomplish negotiating with sellers, arranging for security, or establishing long-term management of reserves. Our principal role is raising money, and we take great care to make sure that the necessary steps and needs are met before we donate.

Our first effort to raise money was for Lou Jost and Fundación Ecominga, in 2006, to preserve a small limestone canyon and the orchids of the Rio Anzu in Ecuador. We are currently fundraising for an expansion of Ecominga's Dracula Reserve in northern Ecuador to protect several properties (1,176 acres) near the Colombian border where draculas were first discovered. The area is threatened by road development, conversion to agriculture, and plant collection.

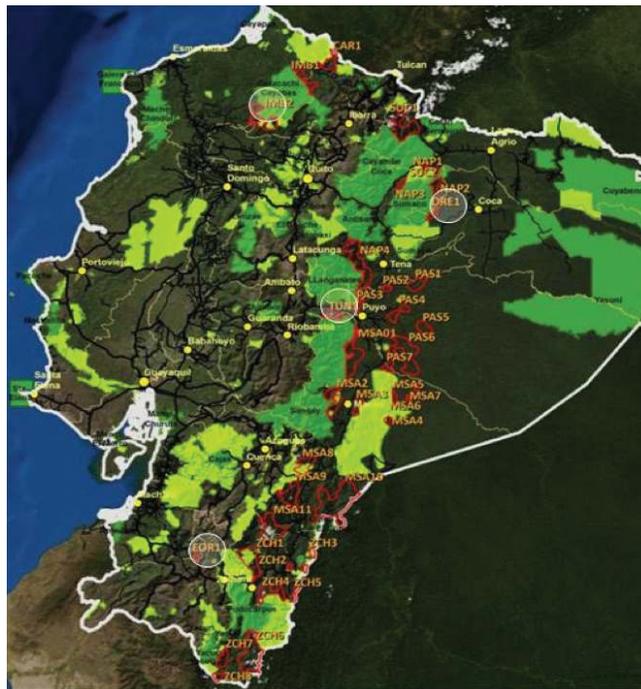
In 2010, OCA donated \$15,000 to the Ceiba Foundation of Tropical Conservation to fund the Ecuador Orchid Gap Analysis to predict potential sites for new orchid reserves in Ecuador. It identified four areas of greatest interest, highlighted on the map by white circles. Three areas are close to protected areas, so the fourth EOR1 in the south is currently of highest interest.

In 2013, we donated to purchase land in Brazil where we supported the Serra Bonita Reserve of the Fundação Uiraçu in the state of Bahia, near Camacão. The Rainforest Trust matched OCA donations whose goal was to raise \$50,000. Also, in the fall of 2013, we donated to purchase land in Colombia, the Yumartán Reserve of the Fundación Kindicocha near the Sibundoy valley and the Selva de las Ventanas Reserve of the Fundación Salvamontes near Medellín. This year we are fundraising to initiate a new reserve, La Palma, in Colombia's Sibundoy valley. Frequently, new species of orchids, as well as other flora, are discovered in these reserves. More information about some of the reserves is available on our website: www.orchidconservationalliance.org.

To date, we have raised just over \$300,000. As previously mentioned, the Rainforest Trust has matched some of our donations, and we are very grateful for their help. Together we have raised \$527,842 to acquire 3,251 acres. We raise funds in three ways: memberships, sales of orchid-related merchandise, and offering Orchids in the Wild© trips to the public. Donations are the most profitable, the trips are the most fun, and the orchid merchandise offers a way to attract public attention at orchid shows where we have a sales booth.

Additionally, all the directors are available for speaking engagements at orchid societies on a variety of topics. The funds raised from speaking all go to conservation since the directors serve as volunteers. We pay no salaries.

We invite inquiries from organizations interested in conserving orchid-rich land. Please contact Peter Tobi-



Ecuador Gap Analysis map.

as through the OCA website, www.orchidconservationalliance.org.

Our efforts are but a small contribution to the environmental problems of our current world. For the rare orchid endemic in a small region of that world, we hope that OCA's help will be a huge contribution.*

Orchid Conservation Alliance
Orchids In The Wild®
Trips for 2020

March **Southern Yunnan, China:** This 10 day post-World Orchid Conference tour begins in Jinghong and includes visits to a botanic garden, nature reserves and the only wild elephant sanctuary in China. 12 guests.

April **COSTA RICA:** This 14 day tour begins in San Jose and includes visits to Lankester Botanic Garden, Bosque de Paz, and other nature reserves. 16 guests.

Sept **Australia:** This 14 day tour begins in Perth and features visits to King's Park Botanic Garden, Wireless Hill, and nature reserves north and south of Perth. 14 guests.

Details and Reservations: For details, see our website. \$500 deposit holds your space, first come, first served, on any of these trips. All deposits are fully refundable.

www.orchidconservationalliance.org

The OCA is a 501(c)(3) corporation and registered CA Seller of Travel # 2117150-40.