

The Orchid Conservation Alliance
564 Arden Drive
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ORCHID CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

August 12, 2009

Dear OCA Member -

Since last year ended on such a downer for the economy I thought it might be more cheerful to send you a 2009 letter, rather than a report on 2008. As some of you know, I am lucky enough to live one-half mile from the southwestern rim of the continental US, here in Encinitas. This morning there were dolphins surfing the swells of the Pacific. I love that sight. It reminds me that for all the trouble our economy is in, at least some of the natural world is still fresh and beautiful. It's our important job to help keep it that way.

I am also fortunate enough to have been in both Brazil and Ecuador in the last few months. Brazil was a business trip, but I bootstrapped in a little orchidizing. My day job is Associate Professor of Immunology and Microbial Science at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California. In April I had the opportunity to teach a short immunology course in Rio de Janeiro. During that trip I visited a number of orchid friends and made some contacts that I am hopeful will lead to projects the OCA can support. One orchid contact was Claudio Fraga. I first met Claudio at the 3rd International Orchid Conservation Congress in San Jose, Costa Rica in 2007. Claudio is a taxonomist on the staff of the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Garden. Over the last three years, Claudio has led a survey trying to find the remaining wild sites of some of the iconic orchids of the Atlantic Rainforest, including *Cattleya schilleriana*, *Laelia lobata*, *L. virens*, *L. perrinii*, *L. grandis*, *L. jongheana*, *L. tenebrosa*, *L. fidelensis*, and *L. xanthina*. Some populations have indeed been found, and some are in areas that are already marked as parks or reserves. However, way up in the northeast corner of the state of Rio de Janeiro is a remote area that has four of the species and no reserves of any kind. I have asked Claudio to prepare a proposal for the OCA that could lead to the development of reserves to protect these species. As details from Claudio are forthcoming, I will pass these along to you. I am really very excited about this prospect. The Atlantic Rainforest of Brazil is home to many orchids that we all know and love, either as species or as parents of hybrids. The area has been subjected to agricultural development for four centuries and currently is home to probably more than half the population of the country. As a result, only a few percent of the original forest is left in pristine condition. The OCA was founded with the intent to focus on small areas that had unique orchid resources, and it appears that Claudio has found just such an area.

Later, in June, I was in Ecuador with a group of 15 OCA members visiting two nature reserves centered around orchids. We also traveled around looking at orchids in the wild, a wonderful thing to do in an orchid-rich country like Ecuador. One of the reserves we visited was El Pahuma, which was developed by the Lima family with the help of the Ceiba Foundation for

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Tropical Conservation (CFTC; see www.ceiba.org). The OCA is currently funding a geobotanical study through CFTC to identify locales with unique orchid resources. I hope this study will be finished about a year from now with recommendations for the creation of new orchid reserves in Ecuador. We also visited one of the reserves created by Fundación EcoMinga (see www.ecominga.net). This was the Rio Anzu reserve, the creation of which was funded in part by the OCA. Our visit to the reserve included a glorious hike, mostly in the rain, down to the river to see colonies of *Phragmipedium pearcei*. Ironically, the rain had been very heavy the previous day, and the river had risen so high that the plants had been submerged and all the flowers stripped off. When we got there the water had fallen to reveal several hundred plants, but not a single flower was to be seen. However, they sure looked well watered and very clean! Distressingly, along the trail we came upon a tree that had been recently cut down. The tree was a Sangre de Drago or Dragon's Blood tree (*Croton lechleri*), the sap from which is believed to have medicinal qualities. No wood had been taken, but the bark had been slashed in many places for the sap to run out and be collected. While FundaciónEcoMinga has several guards, they are deployed in the larger reserves that the foundation also maintains. Clearly, another guard is needed to help protect the valuable resources in these reserves. If this year's fund raising is successful, the OCA should be able to supply the \$4000 annual salary to support another guard.

Which brings up the subject of money. I hate to harp on this topic, but
without funds we will not be able to do anything.

Despite last year's economic downturn, the OCA budget didn't do too badly. We ended 2008 with a balance of \$16,600. During the year we raised \$13,420 and spent \$5330. Of that expense, \$4830 was for printing OCA brochures, approximately 18,000 of which were distributed in the AOS magazine *Orchids*. I wish I could say that this effort netted substantial income for the OCA, but it did not. A similar effort in the *Orchid Digest* the year before did much better. The remaining \$500 in expenses were principally for office and web site costs. **Thus, we have raised the \$15,000 that is needed to fund our first priority project**, the geobotanical analysis of locations in Ecuador that will define where new orchid-focused reserves should be developed. This analysis is exactly the kind of work that Claudio Fraga has been doing in Brazil and will provide the map for our future efforts in Ecuador. In the United States, I made a tour through several California orchid societies at the end of last summer, and it was very heartening to see so many people interested in orchid conservation. More than thirty new individuals and several societies signed on as OCA members. Currently, we have over 230 individual members and an impressive list of member orchid societies.

We have had several fundraising events this year, and more are planned. The most profitable was the trip to Ecuador, which raised \$4665 from the participants. The directors who went on the trip, like me, all paid their own expenses, as they have on past trips. Earlier, from the Santa Clara Valley Orchid Show, we received \$920, part in cash from the Santa Clara Valley Orchid Society and several individuals and part from the sale of plants donated by vendors at the SCVOS show. Thanks to Tom Perlite (Golden Gate Orchids) for seeing to the auction of those plants at a meeting of the San Francisco Orchid Society and to the donating vendors, Cal-Orchids Bruce Rogers, Andy's Orchids, and Golden Gate Orchids. Very recently, I attended the Santa Barbara International Orchid Fair at the invitation of the Santa Barbara Orchid Estate. That weekend netted \$370 and probably a volunteer to work in Ecuador for six months with either CFTC or Fundación EcoMinga. Later this

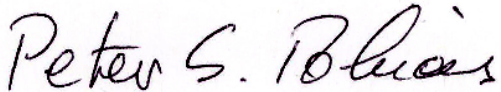
year I'm looking forward to a sale put on by the San Francisco Orchid Society and the Southland Orchid Show at the Huntington Library in October. And, in the very near future*, we will have a page on the web site where orchid related art work and other items will be for sale, including a wonderful new book on the mountains of the Atlantic Rain Forest near Rio de Janeiro. The OCA will be the sole US distributor for this book. I'm hoping that our alliance will prosper from these events.

Even with all these fundraising efforts, our most important source of financial support is still you, the members of OCA. Neither orchid trips nor my travels nor sales can raise the funds we need. Later this year I will be writing to each of you to renew your membership in the OCA. With 230 members I am optimistic that we can raise over \$10,000 just by each and every one of you renewing your membership. We must build a reserve so that we can act promptly when property suitable and available for a reserve is identified. We cannot expect a landowner who wants to sell his/her property to wait years while we scramble for funds. We must be ready to act. In addition to renewing your membership, I'm hopeful that you, the members of the alliance, will urge your friends and your orchid societies to join. You and they can be very proud to be members of the most successful orchid conservation organization in the country.

I know that the economy has not been kind to anyone. **Here is my proposal: Make donating to the OCA an important part of your orchid hobby.** Instead of investing in one or two more plants, make an investment in wild orchids. If each member does that we will easily raise \$10,000.

Then, when you've got the money to take a trip somewhere, go see the wild orchids in which you invested. You'll be glad you did and astonished at the sight! In 2010 I hope to take a group of OCA members to Brazil to see *Cattleya intermedia* in the sand dunes of the beaches near Rio de Janeiro, as pictured at the right. That is only one of the amazing orchid sights to be seen in Brazil. Details to follow at the beginning of 2010. Let me know if you are interested.

Best regards,


Peter S. Tobias

Tobias



C. intermedia in the dunes near Cabo Frio.

* It's ready! Have a look at the new 'Merchandise' page on our web site.