

The Orchid Conservation Alliance  
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ORCHID CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

February 14, 2011

Dear OCA Member:

Greetings to everybody. From the country's weather news it seems likely that most of the OCA membership is paying some steep heating bills for their orchids, whether they are in greenhouses or even just in a sunny window. Except for places like Key West and southern California, the weather is good only for the native orchids. In New England, my daughter's *Cypripedium acaule* is certainly well below freezing but will bloom very nicely in just a few months.

Some of you have written to say that you are enjoying the Ecuador/Orchid calendar. The membership renewal campaign for 2011 has gone fairly well, but I guess the economy must be affecting many of you. To my surprise, fewer than half of the members from 2009 and 2010 have re-upped. Hey folks, the OCA needs you! When we apply to foundations for money, they want to know how many members we have. **Every person rejoining is a vote for orchid conservation.**

Excellent news comes from Australia and it provides a lesson in the need for reserves: Australia has many unique orchids and the genus *Pterostylis* includes many of them. One of these, *Pterostylis valida* or the Robust Greenhood, was last seen in 1941 and had been thought extinct. However, this year it was seen again and has been nicknamed the Lazarus Orchid. The find was made in an area known as the Nardoo Hills Reserve in central Victoria, in the southern part of Australia. The area is managed by the Bush Heritage. They put land aside for conservation and manage it to minimize threats including invasive weeds, rabbits, and inappropriate fires. The reserve was established in 2006 and 2007 to protect habitat for several birds. It has become home to Australia's largest population of the endangered golden moths orchid, *Diuris protena*. And now it is also home to the only population of the Robust Greenhood. There is a pretty obvious moral in this story. If you want native species to thrive, orchids or anything else, they need to be left alone in reserves. See <http://www.bushheritage.org.au/default.aspx> for the full story and other links to more information.



*Pterostylis valida* , the Robust Greenhood. Photo: Jeroen Van Veen

At the moment I'm reading a book by Ken Thompson entitled "Do We Need Pandas ?" I've only read the first half, but that is certainly interesting. To me it is quite obvious that we need to conserve orchids in the wild, but coming up with a rational explanation of why we need to do this has been very difficult. I once wrote to Bill McKibben (<http://www.billmckibben.com>), a noted conservationist, and

asked him if just wanting such beautiful things to continue to exist was reason enough to conserve them. He answered that it seemed as good a reason as any. Ken Thompson is currently discussing the need for preservation of nature in terms of the value that nature provides; some of these are called 'ecosystem services.' What is an ecosystem service, you ask? Those are the things we get free from nature - fresh water, oxygen in the air, recycling of many wastes, and wild caught food are all examples of an ecosystem service. Estimating the monetary value of those things is difficult. For most of them we don't actually pay anything.

An excellent example of recognizing the need for ecosystem services is provided by Tijuca National Forest in Rio de Janeiro. By the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rio de Janeiro had been settled for about 300 years and the Tijuca forest had supplied sufficient fresh water. However, when the King of Portugal fled Napoleon and moved to Rio in 1808 the population increased significantly and this led to ever increasing demands for fresh water. It became apparent that the mountains around Rio were delivering less and less water to the city as coffee and sugar plantations expanded. Consequently, in 1861 the successor King ordered that farming be removed from the mountains and reforestation be undertaken. Getting things done was simpler then. As a consequence, Tijuca is now a forest inside the city of Rio de Janeiro and is the largest urban park anywhere in the world. Pockets of forest left (reserves!) that were unsuitable for farming served as seed sources for orchid regeneration and the park now has quite a few orchids. During the OCA trip last October we spent a morning walking through Tijuca with two friends of Rosario Almeida Braga's, Paulo Damaso and Zeca Abreu Trindade. It was still very dry from the winter dry season when we were there and we didn't see a lot of flowers. However, I recently received a CD with pictures of orchids in Tijuca, thanks to Paulo and Zeca who took the photos. A few of these are below and I have posted the rest at <http://picasaweb.google.com/109589447296882773220>.

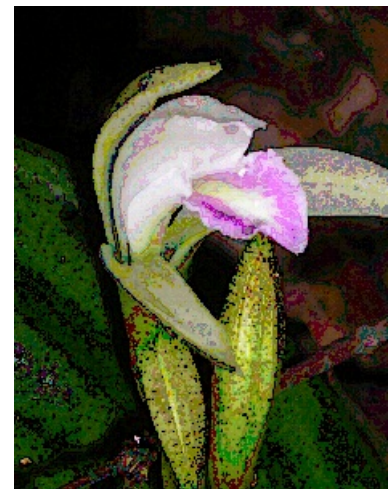
From these examples in Australia and Brazil, it seems to me that the case for reserves is very clear. That is why OCA's goal is to protect wild orchid habitat.



*Octomeria sp.*



*Laelia crispa*



*Psylochilus modestus*

Sincerely,

Peter Tobias, OCA President

If you haven't already done so,  
please rejoin now!