

Rainbow over the forests of the Dracula Reserve

## Fundación Ecominga

The Dracula Reserve is a conservation area in northern Ecuador. Established in 2015, it is located near the border with Colombia, managed by Fundación EcoMinga, and was funded by several conservation organizations including the Orchid Conservation Alliance (OCA) and the Rainforest Trust. A lush green landscape of forests and mountains currently covering over 2800 acres, it is a hotspot of diversity for the orchid genus Dracula, for which the reserve was named. The Dracula Reserve is known to contain an incredible diversity of flora and fauna, many of which are endemic to the valley in which the reserve is situated. Early surveys of the Dracula Reserve identified over 400 different orchid species from 55 different genera, and this list continues to grow. In the Pleurothallid Alliance alone, there are numerous genera represented, including Andinia, Dracula, Dryadella, Lepanthes, Masdevallia, Muscarella, Myoxanthus, Porroglossum, Scaphosepalum, Stelis, Trichosalpinx and Trisetella. Recent animal discoveries include new species of mice, shrew opossums, frogs, toads and lizards.

Of great interest to the OCA, the reserve also contains new orchid species, including Lepanthes tulcanensis, Pleurothallis chicalensis, Pseudolepanthes bihuae, and Scaphosepalum zieglerae, and as well as a number of new Lepanthes, Pleurothallis and Trevoria sp. that have yet to be described. Biological field research is being carried out here by people from several national and foreign institutions, and there are sure to be more exciting discoveries as they explore this incredible place.

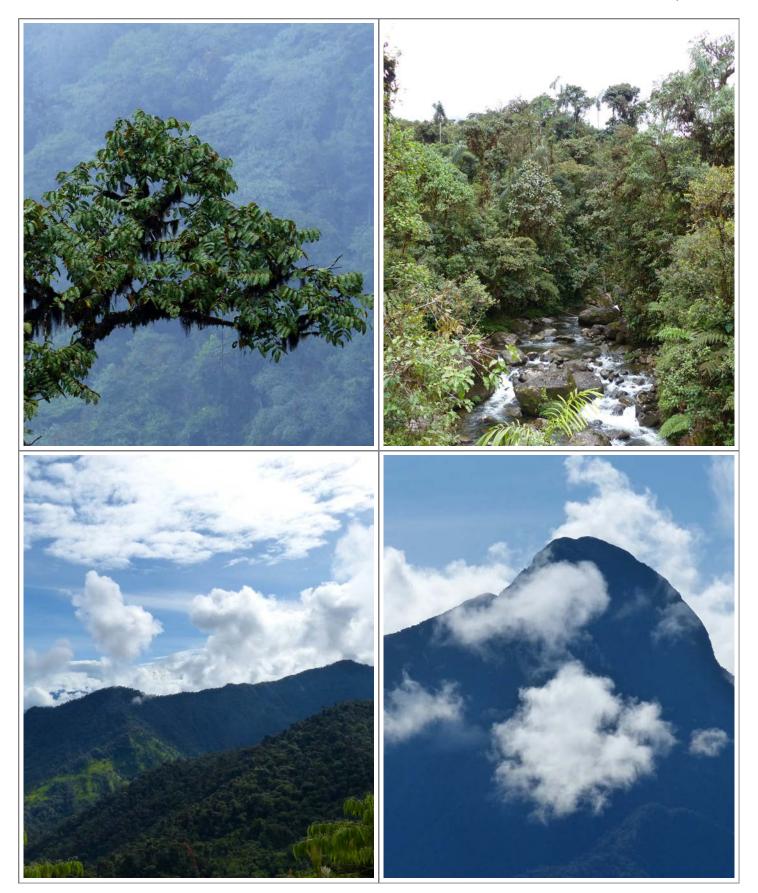
It is therefore with great urgency that we are asking all of our members to help us prevent irreversible damage and destruction to this incredible place. The peace, quiet, diversity and sheer wonder of this reserve are now threatened by illegal gold mining, and this is something we have to stop as soon as possible.

Gold mining is one of the most destructive industries in the world. It displaces communities, contaminates drinking water, and destroys pristine environments permanently. Gold mining pollutes both the water and the land with mercury and cyanide, toxic chemicals that are damaging to all flora and fauna, including the human inhabitants. The mining leads to erosion that clogs streams and rivers, and can even taint marine ecosystems far downstream of the mine site. Most forms of gold mining involve moving massive amounts of soil and rock. Miners have already started mining on two privately-owned properties adjacent to the Dracula Reserve, and we desperately need your help to purchase one of these large lots (274 acres) from the landowner. The second parcel will be purchased by another foundation that is also currently raising funds. The owners want to sell to Fundación EcoMinga, and not the mining companies, but we need to raise USD\$100,000 as soon as possible to complete the transaction.

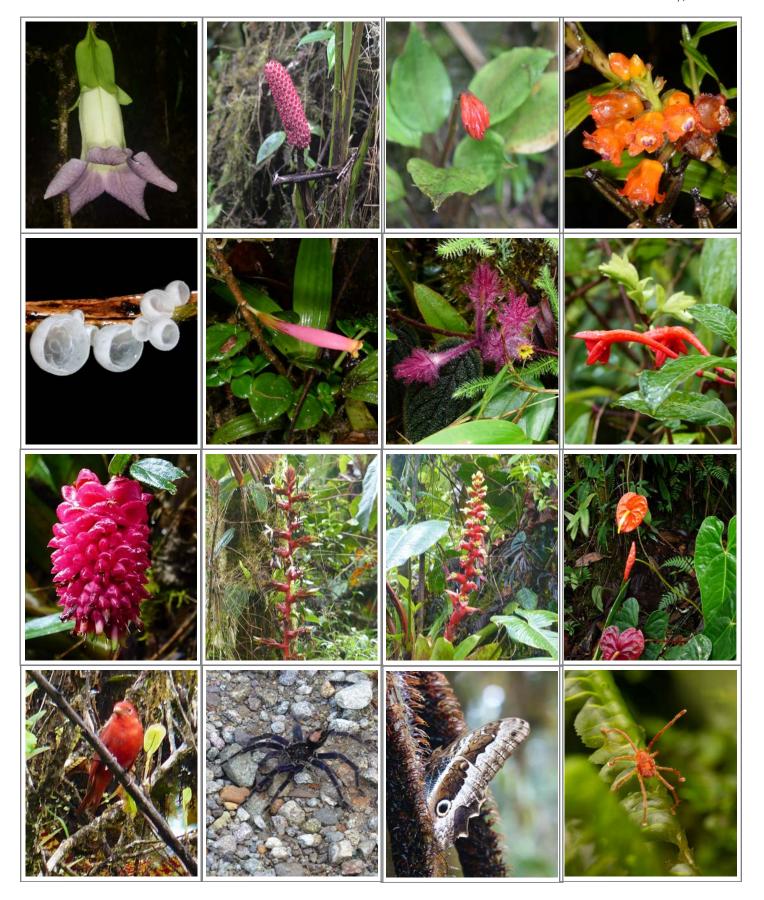
In the following pages, we are sharing photographs that show what a special place the Dracula Reserve is. The photos shown were taken on two separate expeditions-one by the directors of the OCA in January of 2016, and the second one in 2021 by Callie Broaddus and her colleagues from Reserva: The Youth Land Trust (<a href="https://reservaylt.org/">https://reservaylt.org/</a>). There are also some photos from the EcoMinga staff (Lou Jost and Marco Monteros). The density and richness of the flora are breathtaking-one can hardly take a step without finding a Lepanthes, Masdevallia, Platystele, Stelis, Epidendrum, Maxillaria, Andinia, or Scaphosepalum. Additionally, the spectacular flowers of different Cyrtochilum species wind their way through the canopy, and unusual Sobralia species can be found in the more open spaces. Imagine entire tree trunks coated with the bright red flowers of Porroglossum eduardii! And, of course, numerous Dracula species can be found within the reserve as well as in the surrounding forest.

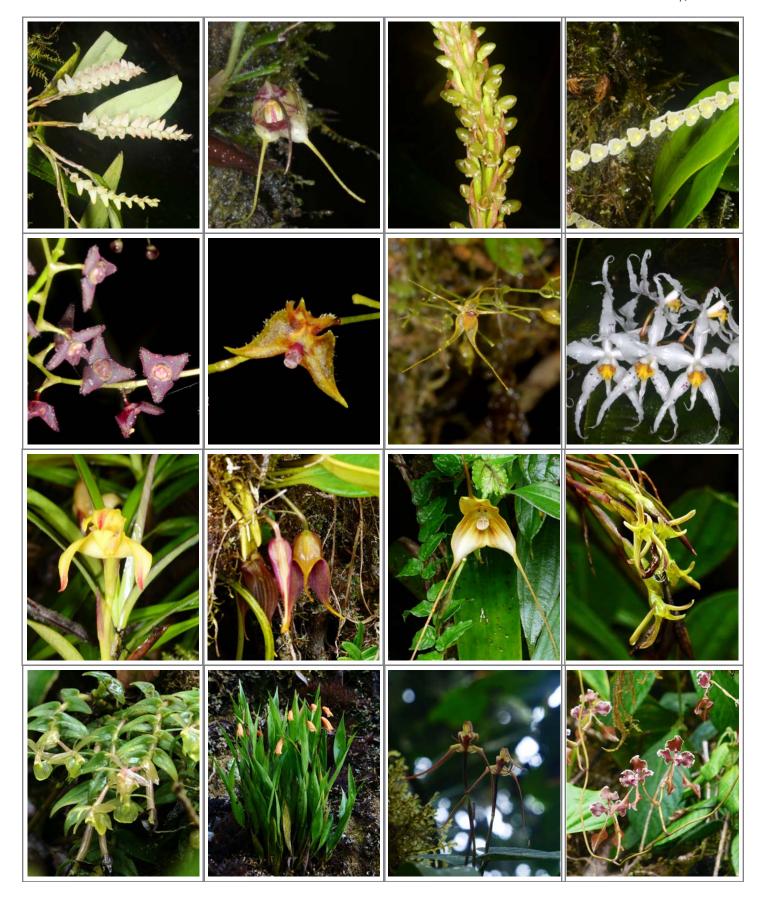
Hiking on one of the few trails in the reserve, it is not uncommon to find enormous, brightly colored bromeliads, gesneriads, passion flowers, and anthuriums. Curiously patterned and textured begonia species can be found in abundance. A careful look among the lush vegetation often reveals tiny frogs, salamanders and lizards, several of which have been shown to be new to science. For insect and arachnid lovers, there is an abundance of different butterflies and moths, stick insects, odd centipedes, huge purplish tarantulas and unusual, brightly colored spiders. The reserve is also home to mammals, both small and large, including forest mice, shrew opossums, pumas, peccaries and brown headed spider monkeys.

Additionally, the staff and volunteers at EcoMinga have gone to great lengths to involve the local community. During the pandemic, together with the OCA and several other donors, funds were raised to purchase and deliver food supplies to the villagers, an outreach that was greatly appreciated. Also during the pandemic, Ecominga worked with communities and local organizations to provide internet access for the children's education, and to educate the children and their families about the forests and their inhabitants. Please enjoy the photos!













We sincerely hope that that these photos help convey some of the incredible biodiversity that is protected in the Dracula Reserve. However, as mentioned above, however, this pristine forest is now in grave danger from illegal gold mining on adjacent properties. Please help us prevent the scenario below (example of gold mining damage at another location).



Donations can be made here on the OCA website or you can mail a check payable to The Orchid Conervation Alliance. Address: % Mary Gerritsen, 541 Parrott Drive, San Mateo, CA 94402. All donations, big or small, are welcome. Encourage your friends and fellow orchid lovers to support this fundraising effort!

We are making good progress toward our goal, but we need your contribution

For more details listen to Javier Robayo on the <u>In Defense of Plants Podcast</u> "Dracula Orchids and the Threat of Gold Mining"

#### Other news from Fundación EcoMinga

communicated by Lou Jost

In other EcoMinga news, the Ministry of the Environment admitted the Rio Zuñac and Cerro Candelaria Reserves into the National System of Protected Areas. This gives them the same level of protection as a national park. In particular this makes it very difficult for a mining company to get concessions in these reserves. This took an intensive and frustrating seven-year effort on the part of EcoMinga, helped and financed by WWF-Ecuador. EcoMinga made this effort primarily to prevent situations like those in our Dracula and Manduriacu reserves, where mining remains a threat.

The acting Minister of the Environment came to Baños to make the declaration, and this resulted in a fruitful meeting and public event. Here is a link with a picture of the Minister photographing a spectacular new species of frog the EcoMinga folks discovered in the Machay reserve.

https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/cerro-candelaria-rio-zunag-protegidas.html

# <u>Fundación EcoMinga's Javier Robayo Named one of the "50 people changing the world"!</u>

by The Explorers Club

(reprinted from a press release communicated by Callie Broaddus. Reserva: The Youth Land Trust)

**WASHINGTON, DC, March 16, 2022** — Ecuadorian conservationist, biologist, and educator Javier

Robayo was recognized today as one of "The Explorers Club 50: Fifty People Changing the World the World Needs to Know About" ("EC50"). Since 1904, The Explorers Club has supported scientific expeditions of all disciplines, including several "famous firsts"—first to the North Pole, South Pole, summit of Mt. Everest, deepest point in the ocean, and surface of the moon—and the work of household names including Jane Goodall, Theodore Roosevelt, Buzz Aldrin, and Sylvia Earle. The historically exclusive club launched the EC50 in 2021 to "expand the definition and reflect the great diversity of exploration" and to help amplify the voices of leaders from around the world who deserve a greater spotlight on their work.

Robayo is the executive director of Fundación EcoMinga, a nonprofit which maintains over 27,000 acres of protected areas in Ecuador's Chocó and Tropical Andes. As a biologist and educator, he has led more than 200 research and teaching expeditions in Ecuador. His extensive, collaborative field work has led to the discovery of more than 10 species of orchids, a new genus containing two species of rodents, a new genus of frog, and five other species of amphibians. He shows respect and love for the earth by helping his park rangers



and young researchers recognize and protect species in this biodiversity hotspot. Robayo's work focuses on highlighting biodiversity to prevent the deforestation of these irreplaceable forests, which are severely threatened by agricultural deforestation and mining exploration.

Robayo was nominated for the award by Callie Broaddus, who received the same award in 2021 as the founder of youth-led conservation group, Reserva: The Youth Land Trust. About the announcement, Broaddus says, "I am thrilled that the Explorers Club is shining a light on the important work Javier does at such a critical moment for conservation in Ecuador. Extractive industries are threatening the survival of some of the world's most biodiverse and unique ecosystems, including areas presumed to be protected. It is leaders like Javier who will ensure Ecuador's youth have a livable future with clean drinking water, stable soil, and healthy ecosystems sustained by rich biodiversity."

#### News from Corporación SalvaMontes

communicated by Sebastián Vieira

The most recent property purchased by SalvaMontes was a 70 ha parcel (Llano Alto), an expansion of Los Magnolios natural reserve, a property that is a key piece for connecting

Los Magnolios with the two biggest and best preserved forest remnants in the Alto de Ventanas.

This area is now also confirmed as the habitat of *Lepanthes golondrina* (listed in the IUCN red list as Endangered) and *Dracula lemurella* (now listed in the IUCN red list as Critically Endangered).

SalvaMontes has two active fundraising campaigns for land purchase. One of them is to raise funds for the purchase of El Castillo and La Esperanza 2, the two biggest and best preserved forest remnants with the help of This is my Earth (<a href="https://this-is-my-earth.org/habitat/reserva-natural-los-magnolios/">https://this-is-my-earth.org/habitat/reserva-natural-los-magnolios/</a>). The other one is for the creation of a new natural reserve in El Darien gap, for the protection of a magnificent palm tree (<a href="https://www.gofundme.com/f/IPS-save-the-species">https://www.gofundme.com/f/IPS-save-the-species</a>). For this one, SalvaMontes just released a video: <a href="https://youtube/OJM-olJwA24">https://youtube/OJM-olJwA24</a>

SalvaMontes is also finishing the 1st year of a 3 year long project funded by Foundation Franklinia for the restoration of Magnolia populations in Alto de Ventanas: <a href="https://">https://</a> fondationfranklinia.org/en/conservation-magnolia-species-colombia/. This has allowed them to double the number of adult Magnolia trees known in nature and produce more than 80 plantlets from collected seeds. SalvaMontes has involved local campesinos by protecting and planting native trees instead of logging the forest.

The design and construction licencing details for the research cabin (funded by a donation from The Pleurothallid Alliance) are ongoing in order to be able to start construction. There is a third new *Lepanthes* species that will be available for naming in the future, but Sebastián is making sure that he has the needed material, in order to be able to publish the description without delays.

#### **Orchid Conservation Alliance Speakers Bureau**

Since the initiation of the speaker's bureau in late 2021, this fundraising initiative has generated over \$8778 in donations to the OCA! What is the speaker's bureau? It is a panel of speakers who, when asked to speak at an orchid society (or other plant society related meeting) have donated their speaker's fee directly to the OCA. For these generous efforts we would like to thank Carrie Buchman, Roberta Fox, Mary Gerritsen, Debby Halliday, Ron Kaufmann, Bill Loy, Scott McGregor, Peter Tobias and Gary Yong Gee. You can learn more about the speaker's bureau here: <a href="https://orchidconservationalliance.org/speakers/">https://orchidconservationalliance.org/speakers/</a>. If you are a speaker and interested in joining this effort and getting listed on our webpage, please contact Mary Gerritsen at <a href="mary@orchidconservationalliance.org">mary@orchidconservationalliance.org</a>.

#### The Orchid Conservation Alliance Needs You!

Would you be interested in serving on the OCA board of directors, or taking on one of the board's many roles? We could use your help! All positions are volunteer, enabling nearly 95% of our funds to go towards habitat preservation. Contact any of the board of directors for more information:

peter@orchidconservationalliance.org mary@orchidconservationalliance.org ron@orchidconservationalliance.org



Native tree plantation at SalvaMontes



Lepanthes golondrina



Sabinaria magnifica



New *Pleurothallis* sp. (available for naming)

#### Orchid Societies Stepping up to Conserve Orchids

The Orchid Conservation Alliance is just that, an alliance of like-minded orchid enthusiasts who sincerely want to do something to help preserve orchids and their habitats. Over the last several years, a number of orchid societies have been loyal supporting members of the OCA. We would like to acknowledge these societies.

Alabama Orchid Society **Amherst Orchid Society** Blue Ridge Orchid Society of South Carolina **Boca Raton Orchid Society** Cherry City Orchid Society Colorado Springs Orchid Society Conejo Orchid Society Cool Growing Orchid Society **Delaware Orchid Society** Diablo View Orchid Society **Fascination of Orchids** Five Cities Orchid Society Fort Lauderdale Orchid Society Gainesville Orchid Society Genesee Region Orchid Society **Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society Greater Westchester Orchid Society** Hilo Orchid Society Illinois Orchid Society Kentucky Orchid Society Little Egypt Orchid Society Lord Fairfax Orchid Society Malibu Orchid Society Memphis Orchid Society Mid Hudson Orchid Society New Hampshire Orchid Society New Jersey Orchid Society Newport Harbor Orchid Society North Jersey Orchid Society Northwest Orchid Society Oklahoma Orchid Society Orange County Orchid Society Orchid Forum of Sacramento

Orchid Society of Greater Kansas City

Orchid Society of Greater St. Louis

Orchid Society of Middle Tennessee

Orchid Society of Santa Barbara

Orchid Society of Southern California

Orchid Society of Western Pennsylvania

**Orchid Species Society** 

**Oregon Orchid Society** 

Peninsula Orchid Society

Pinelands Orchid Society

Portland Orchid Society

Ramapo Orchid Society

Riverside/San Bernardino Counties Orchid Society

Sacramento Orchid Society

San Diego County Orchid Society

San Diego Horticultural Society

San Fernando Valley Orchid Society

San Francisco Orchid Society

Sandpiper Orchid Society

Santa Clara Valley Orchid Society

Slipper Orchid Alliance

Sonoma County Orchid Society

South Coast Orchid Society

St. Mary's Orchid Society

The Orchid Species Society

The Pleurothallid Alliance

Victoria Orchid Society

Western North Carolina Orchid Society

In addition, several orchid shows have donated part of their proceeds to the OCA

**Fascination of Orchids** 

**Huntington Orchid Show** 

Mid America Orchid Show

Orchids in the Park (San Francisco)

Pacific Orchid Exposition

Santa Barbara Orchid Show

Tamiami International Orchid Festival

**Toronto Orchid Show** 

Don't see your orchid society or show listed here? Bring this up at one of your society meetings! Most orchid societies have some type of statement about supporting conservation and the environment in their mission statement. Here is a wonderful way to support that mission!

For the Dracula Reserve Emergency Fund initiative, the San Francisco Orchid Society has donated \$2500 and offered to match another \$2500 in donations from their membership. Within just a few weeks of starting this initiative, the fund raising reached the goal of \$5000 and more donations from society members are still incoming! Perhaps your orchid society can start a similar campaign.

#### **Orchid Naming Opportunities for Transformative Donations**

We have several new species of *Lepanthes* and *Pleurothallis* from our partners (EcoMinga and SalvaMontes) that are available for naming. You can make a transformative donation of \$15,000 per species name, and have a new species named in your honor (or in honor of someone else). If interested, please contact <a href="marg@orchidconservationalliance.org">marg@orchidconservationalliance.org</a>

### **Orchids in the Wild: Future Trips**

Would you like to be a trip leader on one of our future trips? We have lots of itineraries and plans, including trips to Brazil, eastern Colombia, Costa Rica, Madagascar, Sicily, Sikkim, Papua New Guinea, and Western Australia. Our trips are currently organized and led by one of the members of the board of directors, or occasionally (as in the case of trips to Greece, Switzerland and Chiapas, Mexico), by one of our enthusiastic OCA members. If you are interested in leading one of the above tours, or organizing a new tour, please let us know. We try to limit the number of people on the trips to a manageable number (usually less than 12). As you can imagine, it is very difficult to organize and lead even one tour a year, much less two or three, which would be needed if we were to offer all of these tours in the next two years (we have lots of backlogged tour needs due to the pandemic). You do not need to be an orchid expert, although a good working knowledge of orchids, where they grow and how to recognize them is highly recommended. A trip leader needs good organizational skills, an ability to resolve problems as they inevitably come up, and an ability to work with budgets and itineraries. Typically we contract with an in country tour organization (usually orchid centric) in the target country to arrange hotels, buses, local guides, entrances to parks etc. and our Chief Financial Officer handles the collection of funds from trip participants. On some occasions we also hire a local orchid guide to help with identification of the sites, orchids, etc. The OCA Orchids in the Wild trips have been a major source of our funds. They also get our members excited about orchid habitats and orchid conservation, so we would really like to expand our activities! Let us know if you are interested in getting involved by contacting mary@orchidconservationalliance.org

The OCA trips fill up rapidly, and our members are the first to be notified about them. Be sure to renew your own membership so that you can stay informed about upcoming Orchids in the Wild trip opportunities! Join <a href="https://example.com/here">here</a>

#### Orchids in the Wild Trip to Switzerland (June 2022)

communicated by Peter Tobias

By almost any definition, the OCA's Switzerland trip last month was a huge success: We had great weather, no travel hitches, saw lots of Swiss alpine flowers, and even saw lots of orchids. What more could you want from an orchid trip? The originator and leader of the trip was Judith Rapacz, a Swiss native, who put together a wonderful itinerary and made everything work smoothly. Here's a sampling from the first part of the trip.

**June 12:** We're staying at the Hotel Mercure Krone in Lenzburg, about 25 miles west of Zürich. It's a modern hotel with an outdoor restaurant in a pleasant small town. On the way to Lenzburg from the airport we stop along the side of the road and see our first *Ophrys apifera* and our first purple spikes of *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*, both of which turn out to be fairly common throughout the trip. Common? How about seeing perhaps 5000 *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*, often in swathes of 50 or more in a meadow?

**June 13:** Today we are met at a nature reserve managed by AGED, the Aargau Native Orchids Group, in Obererlinsbach, where AGED's Beat Wartman guides us and identifies what we are looking at, such as *Gymnadenia conopsea*, a light lavender, sweetly scented spire of blooms. This too will be a very common flower in the tour. Later in the day at a different reserve site we see *Limodorum abortivum*. This is the only site in the canton (state) of Aargau where *L. abortivum* is found and also the only one we saw in bloom. This is also the first sighting of *Cephalanthera rubra* and *Neotinea ustulata*, both of which we will see frequently, but never so commonly as the *D. fuchsia* and *Gym. conopsea*. Already today we are all marveling at how orderly and clean







Ophrys apifera

Dactylorhiza fuchsia

Gymnadenia conopsea







Limodorum abortivum Neotinea ustulata

Cephalanthera rubra

Switzerland is; absolutely no trash to be seen anywhere, buses and trains perfectly clean, and seemingly everything in its place.

**June 14**: *Cypripedium calceolus* is a big, showy, and very yellow slipper orchid. The weather in Switzerland has been, Judith tells us frequently, unseasonably warm and the season much advanced from normal. She was worried that we would not see any blooms of this species, but there they are in the Tannbuehl Nature Reserve!

**June 15:** No orchids today, sightseeing instead.

**June 16:** So far, we've been at the Hotel Mercure Krone in Lenzburg, but today we move to the Hotel Paxmontana. My first thought upon seeing the Paxmontana was that we were staying at the







Epipactis palustris

Ophrys holosericea

Ophrys morio

Overlook Hotel, which will be familiar to anyone who has seen *The Shining*. It's a huge lodge of a hotel, with amazing views from every room. Perhaps disappointingly, there did not seem to be any ghosts! We also have a first meeting with Johann Blättler, Swiss native orchid guide extraordinaire, near two small patches of undisturbed wet area with *Epipactis palustris*, *Ophrys morio*, *O. holosericea*, and natural hybrids of the two *Ophrys* species.

**June 17:** We go up Mt. Pilatus via the world's steepest cogwheel railway. Steep! Views of the Bernese Oberland! Bratwurst and roesti for lunch! Classic Switzerland. It seems that Heidi and Peter must be just around the corner somewhere. Wonderful.

**June 18:** We visit a nature reserve with more *Cypripedium calceolus*, *Dactylorhiza* and a variety of other orchids and we finally figure out how to distinguish between *Platanthera bifolia* 







Cypripedium calceolus

Platanthera bifolia

Platanthera chlorantha



Swiss countryside

and *P. chlorantha*. They are very similar but if you look at the pollinia, in *bifolia* they are crosseyed and in *chlorantha* they are wall-eyed! OK, maybe it's not formal orchid terminology, but it works.

**June 19:** This was quite the day. In the morning our bus took us to the Stoeckalp, a beautiful mountain meadow where we boarded a cable-car to take us up to the Tannalp. We walked quite a lot in the alpine meadows and had lunch. In the afternoon, some of us met up again with Johann Blättler, and his wife Elspeth, for an approximately 3 mile, 900 meter elevation change, downhill walk from above the tree line, through the intermediate scrub forest, and into the spruce forest back to the base of the cable car. The walk was advertised as a three hour hike, which it would have been had we not made enough photography stops to accumulate another 2 hours. It was amazing! A few samples below...

Well, this account of our trip is getting to be a little long and I have only talked about the first half. I hope you have a taste for what it was like. Stay tuned for a larger accounting.

I can't close without thanking Judith Rapacz again for her efforts to set up this trip. She started out by







Corallorhiza trifida

Aquilegia alpina

Gymnadenia rubra







Special thanks to all of the OCA Orchids in the Wild participants on the Switzerland trip who contributed to its fun and success!

Posing in front of the 13th century Zytlglogg in Bern: Left to right, Judith Rapacz, Kay Klumb, Tom Givnish, Spiro Kasomenakis. Eric Holenda, Cindy Jepson, Christina Holenda, Valerie Mountain, Gary Yong Gee and Peter Tobias

# Thank you to our donors thus far in 2022 (as of August 5, 2022):

with permission from the donors

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#### ORCHID CONSERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 7, 2022

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Our apologies if we missed you in our acknowledgements. Sometimes donations come in through second parties and it can be very difficult to figure out who the donation came from, particularly if it is the policy of the institute to keep that information anonymous. Anyway, if we missed you, please let us know so we can correct our records, and THANK YOU!

We'd also like to thank our corporate, group and charitable organization sponsors for their support: Amazon Smile, Andy's Orchids, California Corporate Foundation, California Sierra Nevada Judging Center, Como Park Zoo, Equaflor-A, Ecuagenera, Exotic Earth Plants, Facebook, Floriculture, Garden Architecture, International Greenhouse Company, Internet Orchid Species Encyclopedia (<a href="https://www.orchidspecies.com">www.orchidspecies.com</a>), Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, Maria Flowers International, Merck Foundation, Motes Orchids, Natural History Institute (Prescott AZ), Network for Good, Orchids Limited, Orchids Plus More, Texas Instrument Foundation, and The United Way.



Neotinea ustalata
Somewhere in Switzerland!