The 16th. World Orchid Conference - Vancouver

Some species

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The 16th. World Orchid Conference was held at the Canada Place Convention Centre in Vancouver, Canada from April 22 until May 3. The exterior of the centre was reminiscent of Sydney Opera House. The exhibition halls were beneath five enormous sails and surrounded by water on three sides. Views across Burrard Inlet of snow-clad mountains made it a magnificent venue. The first Alaska bound cruise ship of the season docked at the pier alongside the conference centre and the constant buzz of sea-planes added a cosmopolitan dimension to the show. Everything was on site; there was an extensive lecture program with Horticultural and Scientific sessions running concurrently. The overall theme of the Conference was conservation and the key note lecture was delivered by Dr. Phillip Cribb, "Orchids at the Millennium, a Progress Report."

The show itself featured displays from around the world, although the emphasis was on the more flamboyant orchid hybrids a few exhibitors showed a good variety of species as well. Some of the most interesting were those presenting indigenous Canadian orchids. Outdoors Spring had only just arrived but at the show one could admire the delicate pink blooms of *Calypso bulbosa* lifting their heads, different forms of *Cypripedium parviflorum* with bright yellow pouches and contrasting brown sepals and petals. The most striking and darkest form was *C. parviflorum* var. *pubescens*. A most eye catching display of these native orchids was by Bill Bischoff and James Biro. The plants were either seed raised or had been rescued from development sites. They had been positioned so that one could not only see the flowers but also catch their perfume. The darkest form of *C. parviflorum* had a strong scent of aniseed, the paler variety 'makasin' had a scent of honey. The owners had coaxed the plants into flower by taking them into a greenhouse about six weeks prior to the show and placing them outside in the warm sunshine during the day. The Calypsos had required even more cosseting; they first had to be dug out from two feet of snow, the surrounding soil was thawed with boiling water, the plants were then brought into the greenhouse, almost by magic the flowers opened at the show. A display by the Orchid Species Preservation
Foundation of Alberta, Edmonton also included Cypripediums these plants had not been brought on in the same way, they were a mass of fresh foliage only.

J.&L. Orchids, USA exhibited their miniature orchids in a four foot octagonal display cabinet with a cork tree centrepiece. The case was festooned with tiny Pleurothallids, miniature Dendrobiums including a selection of delicately coloured *Dendrobium cuthbertsonii* and also some good forms of *D. victoriae reginae*. A Madagascan *Angraecum compactum* with four flower spikes and *Telipogon ampliflorus* from Costa Rica with two inch red striped yellow flowers were very eye catching. There was a broad variety of specimen miniatures of other genera in the cabinet, such as *Mexicoa ghiesbrechtiana*, *Oncidium cheirophorum* and *Encyclia vitellina*. The cabinet enabled the spectator to get close enough to see the flowers, it also kept the interior humid which was essential to preserve these ephemeral flowers throughout the show. The display gained a gold medal, one of only ten awarded for the entire show. Another cabinet display was by Hoosier Orchids, this included *Sarcoglottis homalogastra*, with a foot long spike of small grey brown snakes head-like flowers, striking but certainly not pretty. The interesting *Gongora gracilis* won a gold medal for the Venezuelan Orchid Society. This species was only described in 1985 by Rudolf Jenny, it originates from Ecuador and had about eighty half inch pale golden speckled flowers.

The majority of other displays relied on hybrids for effect, but some did feature nice specimen species. A few interesting plants that stood out were; a fine specimen of *Angraecum sesquipedale* and a very unusual *Phaius grandiflorus variegata* which had flowers true to the type but very striking variegated foliage: broad white stripes almost took up half the width of the leaf. The latter plant was on the gold medal winning Reserve Champion display of Rod McLellan Co, USA.

A new scheme of judging was tried at the show; plants to be judged could not be used in the display; they had to be formally entered and were lined up on separate benches. There they remained for the duration of the show in their individual classes. The exhibits also had to be entered individually, with the names of the owners covered up. Special for this show were nine tables of competitive classes for variegated Cymbidiums, displayed in attractive Japanese pots. Many of the flowers of *Cymbidium sinense* seemed distorted, presumably due to the effect of the virus that creates the variegation. A special team of experts in this type of plants had been assembled to judge them.
The pros and cons of the new judging scheme provoked some heated discussion amongst delegates. As plants to be judged were concentrated in one area only, judges did not have to wander up and down the hall to find plants, so less time was needed, but it also meant that, sometimes superior, plants that had not been entered could not be considered for judging. For the exhibitors there was the dilemma between leaving the best plants on the display or putting them up for an award. At the closing ceremony a recommendation was made that the World Orchid Conference Committee would draw up some formal guidance on judging for subsequent WOC’s. These guidelines would be based on experience from the previous conferences. The overall impression was that the scheme tried at this WOC would not be attempted again in the same form.

Spurred on by the sight of the wonderful Canadian native orchids at the show, we decided to try and see them in their native habitat. A short flight or ferry ride from Vancouver is Vancouver Island, we had heard that it should be possible to find Calypso in bloom here. Calypso bulbosa is a very widespread species in the Northern Hemisphere, with a distribution covering Northern Canada, Northern Europe, America and Asia to Japan. Vancouver Island and the more inland Rocky Mountains are home to the distinct C. bulbosa var. occidentalis, in this particular form the tuft of hairs at the base of the ridge of the lip is smaller when compared to the more widespread C. bulbosa var. americana which has very prominent yellow hairs.

Our destination was on Route 4 which crosses Vancouver Island between Tofino on the West coast and Nanaimo in the East. The day of our excursion was bright but cool, the drive along the McKenzie river offered spectacular views of water reflecting snow-capped mountains. The top of the pass was still under two feet of snow but at a slightly lower altitude, where the snow had just cleared, Calypso was emerging. The plants were in dappled shade beneath pine trees often growing in association with a pretty yellow Viola. The predominantly solitary plants grew on a slight slope where there was limited undergrowth. We counted about twelve flowers in various stages of development during a two hour search. Sadly a couple of flowers had been picked and discarded on the path by careless visitors.

Close to the Calypsos were some red spikes emerging of Corallorhiza possibly C. maculata or C. mertensiana. These are saprophytic orchids which occur in quite large colonies and move their location from year to year. Another orchid in flower, in a similar habitat to that of Calypso, was Listera cordata, with tiny dark red flowers on a six inch spike. They were most abundant in the
moist parts of the forest near waterfalls. A short distance along the same road was Cathedral Grove. Here enormous Western Red Cedar trees hundreds of years old towered way above, but not a single Calypso was to be found.

The following morning gave an opportunity to whale watch; in the driving wind and rain we managed to see a couple of grey whales feeding; even the bald eagles sheltered on their tree perches. It was a magnificent, but wet end to a varied trip to the 16th. World Orchid Conference.
Illustrations:

06-CAN    Potinaria Haw Yuan Gold 'O-S', Grand Champion, silver.
08-CAN    Paphiopedilum Prince Edward of York 'Grand 1', Reserve Grand Champion, silver.
09-CAN    Martin Motes display of Vandas, Silver medal.
11-CAN    Taiwan Sugar Corporation display, Grand Champion display, Silver Medal.
12-CAN    Taiwan Sugar Corporation display, Grand Champion display, Silver Medal.
13-CAN    Taiwan Sugar Corporation display, Grand Champion display, Silver Medal.
14-CAN    Taiwan Sugar Corporation and part of Strawberry Creek displays.
17-CAN    Dept. of Agricultural Extension, Thailand, display, Gold Medal.
20-CAN    Eric Young Orchid Foundation display, Silver Medal.
23-CAN    Victoria Orchid Society display.  4/99.
25-CAN    J & L display, Gold Medal.
26-CAN    Calypso bulbosa, on the Bischoff & Biro display.
44-CAN    Listera cordata, on Vancouver Island.
46-CAN    Calypso bulbosa and a yellow Viola, Vancouver Island.