

Orchids of Trinidad and Tobago

Julian Kenny

Prospect Press, Trinidad and Tobago. 2008.

Illustrated, Appendices, Glossary, Bibliography, Index; xi, 117p. ISBN 978-976-9508-24-8

Orchids are popularly referred to as being 'exotic,' a word that can mean either or both: 'introduced from or originating in another country;' or 'attractively or remarkably strange or unusual.' It is likely that most persons in Trinidad and Tobago think of these plants in both senses mentioned above, unaware of the number and variety of orchid species in the local flora.

Julian Kenny, author of the book under review, is a well-known naturalist and an avid photographer who has had an interest in orchids for over half a century, an interest sparked when, as a boy, he observed that a potted orchid brought home by his father, grew without soil, contrary to what he had been taught that plants need to be rooted in soil. At that time he no doubt thought that orchids were of foreign origin.

Years later, as a student in Canada, he was introduced to a wider variety of orchids than the potted plant at home and noted terrestrial orchids for the first time. On his return to Trinidad and Tobago, he took up an appointment with the Fisheries Division of the then Ministry of Agricul-

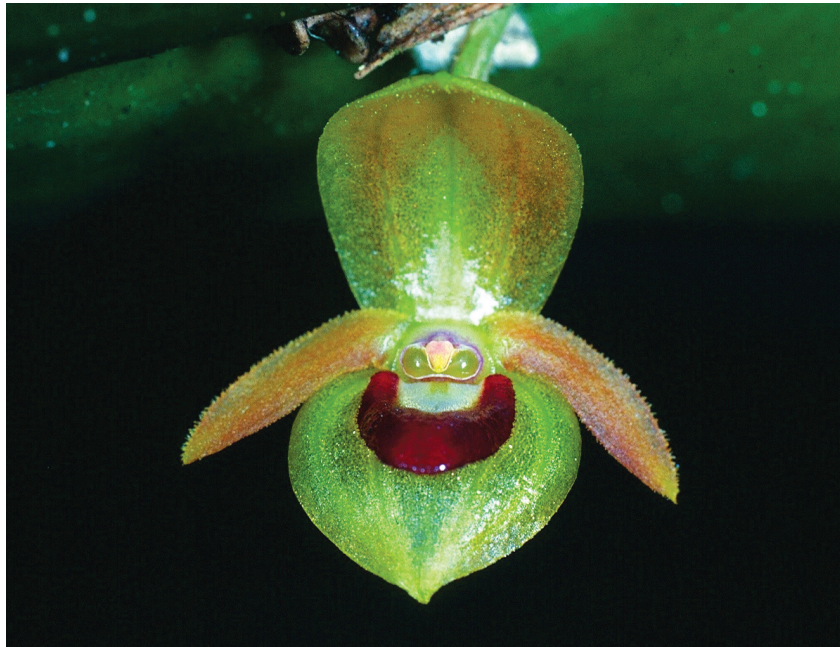
ture, a position that necessitated travelling the length and breadth of the country and he began 'to look at the natural world' about him. Being an avid photographer, he began recording aspects of the flora and fauna of the twin islands

and over the years has built up an impressive collection of images of these elements of our natural history.

As he had done with his earlier publication *Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago* (2006), he has put together his images of the orchids in his collection, on which images the book is based.

The work consists principally of eight chapters, the first three of which deal, one each with: the biology of orchids; the orchid

flora of Trinidad and Tobago; and orchid habitats of the twin islands. These are amply illustrated with full-plate or half-plate photographs in colour. The remaining five chapters are less conventional and consist of galleries of quarter or half-page images of species grouped according to some common feature among them. Thus there are: Showy species; Terrestrial species; 'Botanicals' (species that do not fall naturally into any of the other categories);



Pleurothallis archidiaconi, one of the many orchids photographed by J. S. Kenny.

Others and miniatures; and Threatened and endangered species.

There is a legend accompanying each image in the galleries, giving the botanical name of the species and the common name where one is known, a brief ecological note on the species, dimensions in centimeters and the type of inflorescence borne.

There are two appendices, one detailing the orchid species recorded in Trinidad and Tobago, stating which species occur in both islands and which in one island only, and giving an indication of the status of the species, whether rare, uncommon, common, or uncertain. The other appendix deals with the need for and means of conserving the orchid flora of the twin islands. A Glossary of terms used, a Bibliography and an Index complete the work.

The photography is in most instances superb. A few of the images suffer from the size at which they were rendered and here and there a slight shift in colour.

A problem that an author of works such as this book experiences, is the frequency with which systematists of some plant groups either lump genera together or split them into smaller groups. This results in name changes which

often take place during the gestation period of the book. The current work has not escaped the 'curse' with the result that there are a few name changes from the ones used. For example, the species listed as belonging to the genus *Pogonia*, have been assigned to the genus *Cleistis*.

The printer's imp has been a bit busy with a few of the specific epithets, rendering the initial letter in the upper case.

Overall the work is attractively laid out; the text makes for easy reading; and the sections on orchid habitats and conservation of our orchids a valuable inclusion, for our information and education in a day and age when in the name of 'development' so many natural habitats are being destroyed. For the general reader, the book, which is on sale in major book stores in the country and at the University of the West Indies Book Store, should not be only an attractive addition to the coffee table collection, but also an eye-opener to the variety of orchid species in the local flora.

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