

ORCHID HUNTING IN THE KIMBERLEY

Mike Donaldson opened the November 1996 meeting and introduced the speaker, Pat Dundas, a botanical artist who is very interested in all orchids. Pat informed us that there are more than 300 orchids in Western Australia—12 of them in the Kimberley region. The two epiphytic (i.e. growing on trees, mostly eucalypts) orchids are already growing in Kings Park, collected by Kevin Kenneally and transported back alive. Many of these epiphytes are disappearing in the wild due to illegal over-collection by keen amateurs. The two epiphytes are *Dendrobium* and *Cymbidium* with 7 other genera being terrestrial.

Pat told us of accompanying Kings Park botanist, Kingsley Dixon, to the Kimberley during the wet season when the orchids flower. The trip, sponsored by B.H.P. and Argyle Diamonds, took place in early December 1991 when the group hired a car and set off for the Mitchell Plateau. They were joined by several helpers from Theda, Beverley Springs and King Edward River (now Doongan) stations. Apart from the joy of finding orchids, Pat mentioned taipans, tiny lizards, wild bulls and screaming curlews as highlights of the trip. Unfortunately, fires had wiped out several orchid localities. The group visited Emma Gorge in 40 degree heat and had 4 trips in a charter plan during a one week period, the only way to get around when the heavy rain causes flooding. Eventually, they found two new species for Western Australia and extended the known location for every orchid, so the trip was most successful.

We saw many interesting slides, both of the colourful orchids and of the activities associated with their location and collection. *Dipodium*, the Hyacinth Orchid is terrestrial and grows up to 6 feet tall in long grass and can have over 100 flowers on a single stalk. The rarest orchids are the *Habenarias* or butterfly orchids, with two species, both from the Mitchell Plateau. As for pollinators, the Beard Orchid, *Calochilus holtzei*, seems to attract moths and butterflies as it has long filaments. Pat is now in the process of producing detailed illustrations of every orchid in Western Australia. We hope to see these illustrations published in a book at the end of 1997 and wish her every success with this venture.

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