

Editorial

I have been fortunate in being able to carry out fieldwork in many orchid-rich countries, most recently in Indonesian New Guinea (2023 to 2025, with more to follow). ‘Fieldwork’ has always struck me as a misnomer, since most of the time the terrain where this ‘fieldwork’ takes place is not at all like a field. ‘Densely-forested-steep-slippery-slopes-work’ may be more accurate but is perhaps a little unwieldy.

People who have never done fieldwork seem to fall in two categories: those who believe it is a kind of paid holiday in a nice exotic location and those who imagine it to be a mad adventure in snake-infested jungles where venomous spiders can bite you at any moment. As usual, the truth lies in the middle. Most of the time, things are not as bad as you feared or as good as you hoped. When I am lucky, I find myself in a pristine landscape with gnarly, moss-covered trees and with orchids, the targets of my endeavours, wherever you look. At such moments I feel like a little boy in a toy store who has been told that he can pick what he likes. You don’t know where to begin, you feel spoiled for choice. The botanist H. J. Lam, in his report on an expedition to Mount Doorman in West New Guinea, wrote that the days he spent on the summit were among the happiest in his life. I think I know what he felt. On the other hand, fieldwork also involves sitting for hours on end in a four-wheel drive negotiating roads that barely deserve to be called roads, or sleeping in places that lack the basic comforts we take for granted.



A rainforest stream in Indonesian New Guinea. Photo André Schuiteman

Fieldwork, wherever it takes us, always comes with surprises. In October 2023, my companions and I found ourselves in a remote spot in the neck of the Bird's Head Peninsula in Indonesia's West Papua province, about 50 km SSW of Ransiki. We had reached a small stream in the rainforest and were taking a break on a dry part of the riverbed. At first sight, this looked like every other riverbed, consisting of sand, pebbles and smooth stones. But then I picked up what looked like a dark brown piece of shell. It turned out that many of the stones were fossils, fragments of ammonites, some almost complete. While I was examining these, one of my



Ammonite fossils in a dry riverbed. Photo André Schuiteman

companions, Reza Saputra, spotted a snake in the forest across the stream. It was a Papuan white snake (*Micropechis ikaheka*), which is one of the most dangerous poisonous snakes in New Guinea. We could see the deadly creature slithering about quite openly, light grey rather than white. We decided not to continue our journey across the river and slowly walked back to our car, parked on the side of the only road that crossed this part of New Guinea. There weren't many orchids, anyway.

Back home, I did some research on the fossils. It turned out that ammonites had been found in this part of New Guinea before, and the ones I had seen probably belonged to the most common species, *Macroceratites bifurcatus*. This species is indicative of the Lower Bathonian of the Jurassic period, which makes it about 167 million years old. I also learned that it is believed to have lived in temperate seas, at about the latitude of New Zealand. The fossils I had spotted had presumably travelled some 5000 km during the past 167 million years while the continental plate in which they were embedded moved northwards, to be washed up in a riverbed in New Guinea.

When these ammonites lived, New Guinea did not yet exist, and neither did orchids. They were a vivid and tangible indicator of the tremendous changes that have taken place on earth over vast time periods. I was reminded of these Papuan ammonites when my wife and I took a short holiday in Lyme Regis recently, on the so-called Jurassic Coast of southwest England. Ammonites are among the most commonly found fossils on the beaches there; they have even made it into the design of the lamp posts in the village. Here, however, the ammonites lived in tropical waters, and the rocks in which they were encased had slowly moved towards cooler latitudes, to end up as eroding cliffs facing the cold North Sea. Orchids grow in the turf above the cliffs, but I did not try to find them in the middle of winter. This was, after all, a holiday, not fieldwork.

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Upcoming Conferences

We welcome any news about future orchid conferences for promotion here. Please send details to the editor as far in advance of the event as possible, remembering that the *Orchid Research Newsletter* is published only in January and July of each year.



The **24th World Orchid Conference** will be held in Dresden, Germany from 26 to 29 March 2026. The conference website can be found at <https://www.woc-2026.com/>.

Jobs

We will be happy to announce job opportunities, provided they explicitly involve orchid research or conservation. Please send details to the editor.

Funding Opportunities

We will be happy to announce funding opportunities, provided they explicitly involve orchid research or conservation. Please send details to the editor.

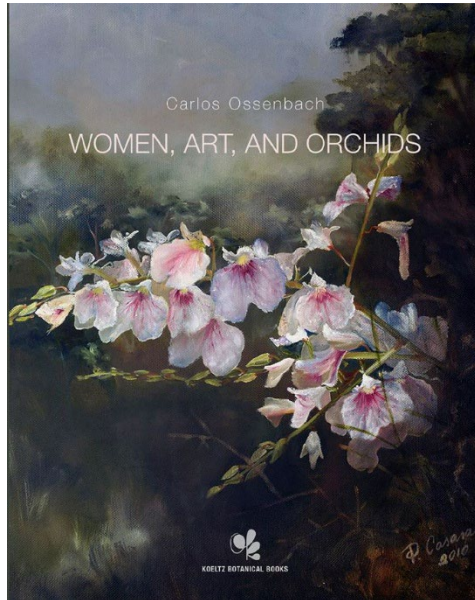
The **American Orchid Society** is soliciting grant proposals for orchid research. Deadline is 1 March of each year. For application instructions see <http://www.aos.org/about-us/orchid-research/application-guidelines.aspx>

News from Correspondents

Please submit any news about recently completed research, future research plans and needs, change of address, upcoming or recent fieldwork, etc. to the editor. Graduate students are especially encouraged to share the subjects of their thesis or dissertation with the international community.

Review

Ossenbach, C. 2025. *Women, Art, and Orchids*. Koeltz Botanical Books, Oberreifenberg, Germany. Hardback, pp. 319, numerous coloured and black-and-white plates. ISBN 9783946583561. Price Euro 115.89 plus VAT.



Based in Costa Rica and working with the talented team assembled by Franco Pupulin at the Lankester Botanical Garden, Carlos Ossenbach's deep dive into the history of orchid collectors, botanists, systematics and art has been a tour-de-force that has significantly enhanced our knowledge of over 300 years of orchid exploration, discovery and science in the tropical Americas. Following his series of publications on the history of tropical American orchids, he has produced a beautifully presented account of the role of women in the exploration and depiction of the orchids of this orchid-rich region. In doing so, he makes a profound point that women have been largely ignored, despite their considerable, and continuing, contribution over the years.

A few of these redoubtable souls are relatively well known to botany. Maria Sybilla Merian (1647–1717) has received acclaim in recent years for her remarkable illustrations of plants and insects in various stages of their metamorphosis, after having been somewhat neglected for nearly two centuries after her death. She has been, in many ways, a flag-bearer for female explorers and botanical artists, having spent two years in Surinam studying nature with both a scientific and an artistic eye. Ossenbach's research has resurrected the lives and art of numerous other women who followed in Merian's footsteps. Some are better known than others. The Victorian artists Florence Woolward and Marianne North were prolific and achieved a degree of fame in their own day, even publishing accounts of orchids or their own adventures. But they were not alone with others, such as Augusta Withers, Matilda Smith, Harriet Thistleton-Dyer, Louise van Panhuys, Sarah Drake, Elizabeth Harrison, Blanche Ames, Edith Norton, Mary Eaton and Dorothy Marsh, contributing superb botanical illustrations to published accounts of orchids.

The book follows a more-or-less historical timeline from the 17th to the 20th Centuries. The introductory chapters cover a rather broader field with accounts of women in science, including Marie Curie, and art, including Angelika Kaufmann (neither having any link with orchids). Some of the more eminent women that follow have a chapter each, thus we learn a lot about Marianne North, Sarah Drake, Lilian Snelling, Marion Sheehan and Margaret Mee. Lesser-known artists receive less-detailed mention in themed chapters, often because little is known about them or their lives. Each chapter is copiously and beautifully illustrated with both artistic and botanical illustrations and by relevant illustrations of people and the places where they worked.

The Royal Horticultural Society, the only awarding society that persists with using botanical art to illustrate its awards, receives its own chapter. Most other societies succumbed many years ago to the ease of photography. The RHS artists who feature here are Nelly Roberts, Minnie

Anson, Jeanne Holgate, Cherry-Anne Lavrih and Iris Humphreys. It is disappointing that no mention is made of the work of Deborah Lambkin, the superlative current long-standing artist. *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, the longest surviving journal with coloured illustrations founded in 1787, also seems short-changed with Matilda Smith and Lilian Snelling the most recent artists to be included. I would like to have seen some mention of Margaret Stones, Pandora Sellars, Christabel King, Carol Woodin and others who have carried on the tradition in magnificent style. Pandora Sellars is widely considered to be the finest botanical artist of the latter part of the 20th Century.

It was informative to be introduced to some of the modern recent artists and their work with which I was unfamiliar. Thus, Christina Fournier, Sylvia Strigari and Pilar Casasa feature here and their fine watercolours demonstrate clearly why they merit inclusion.

I found a few examples where more careful editing would have enhanced the account. Thus, on page 190, the lower captions repeat those of the upper ones for *Notylia sagittifera* and *Nidema boothii*, instead of *Oncidium urophyllum* and *Catasetum viridiflavum*. An index to artists and to the illustrations would also help the reader immensely.

Nevertheless, this fine book is a wonderful addition to our knowledge of tropical American orchidology and I can thoroughly recommend it to readers who will be enchanted by the orchid paintings and enthralled by the often remarkable stories of the women who produced them.

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Recent Orchid Nomenclature

New orchid names may be retrieved from the IPNI website: <https://www.ipni.org/>. Click on “Advanced search”; after the search page appears, type in **Orchidaceae** under family name and select a date in “Recorded after”. This will pull up a list of all orchid names added to the IPNI database since that date. Also be sure to check the Plants of the World Online website (<https://powo.science.kew.org/>) which provides more information with added synonymy, maps and illustrations.

Recent Literature

If you are aware of any relevant and recent citations that should have been listed here or in the previous issues, please send them to the editor for publication in the next issue (July 2026). Book citations should include author(s), year of publication, title, publisher, and place of publication (in that order). Journal titles should be spelled out in full.

Anatomy and morphology

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