



*A Happy
Christmas!!*



Wishing all our societies and their members a happy and enjoyable Christmas!

Like everyone else, I have been very busy in the run up to Christmas, so I am deliberately keeping this newsletter very short. There is a lot happening in the New Year, so there will be a lot of news concerning societies, the problems they are facing and events affecting some of next years shows coming up in the near future.

So with that in mind, please remember the online survey - below

Orchid growing survey

The online survey, organised by Wayne Haywood of Devon OS, is aimed at gauging the well-being of orchid growing both now and into the future in the UK. The survey takes about 2 minutes to complete.

So far there have been over 300 replies, but as many societies have not yet participated the closing date is

31st December 2023. Please click on the link below.

<https://6oef0hl8r2i.typeform.com/to/XOpyXsLu>

So please have your say and help us to understand the health of orchid growing in the UK. The results will be in the January newsletter

I recently received a fairly long document written by Dr Ari Matikka, former president of the Finnish Orchid Society. In this he discusses the issues that are facing orchid societies and makes very interesting reading. As the complete article is rather too long for the newsletter, the second part will follow, in the early January edition. It is well worth taking the time to read it.

Max Hopkinson

Finally - we recently heard the sad news that Max Hopkinson, the president of the BOC had passed away. H2 passed away peacefully at his home on Sunday 10th December. He will be sadly missed by his friends in the orchid community. Our condolences to both his family and East Midland Orchid Society.

A fuller obituary will follow in due course

THE CHALLENGE OF ORCHID SOCIETIES - Part 1

Dr Ari Matikka is a former president of the Finnish Orchid Society and currently sits on the board of the European Orchid Council. He is particularly interested in developing the activities and management of orchid societies.

Membership of orchid societies is declining in many European countries. In larger countries, even a small proportion of enthusiasts can sustain a society. However, in smaller nations, we have older societies that are nearing or have already surpassed the point where the core functions are jeopardised. While the root causes are evident, reversing such trends, especially when driven by powerful forces, is challenging.

The essence of societies lies in community — the collective experience of creating, witnessing, and evolving. By the late 20th century, orchid societies proliferated across Europe, drawing "everyday" plant aficionados. These societies became hubs for discussions, event organisation, collaborative purchases, and even magazine publications to disseminate knowledge and shared experiences.

However, as the 20th century drew to a close, the landscape for orchid societies began to shift. Initially, the commercial availability of orchids exploded. New hybrid varieties, which were vibrant, affordable, and purportedly easy to cultivate, became ubiquitous. These mass-produced orchids soon graced supermarket aisles, stripping them of their earlier mystique and relegating them to the status of common houseplants.

The advent of the internet dealt another blow. Growers no longer depended on a handful of books, society publications, or member gatherings for information. The digital realm provided instant access to care instructions, eroding the societies' informational monopoly. Moreover, the internet reshaped communication among enthusiasts, leading to dwindling attendance at society meetings. The camaraderie, once the backbone of these societies, found a new home online, dispersed across ever-evolving platforms.

As older members still grappled with discussion forums, younger ones had already transitioned to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and beyond. The post-2000 generation, accustomed to concise texts and TikTok videos, represents a distinct cohort. Unlike their predecessors, they don't view conventional online platforms as essential communication tools. For them, values like privacy, individualism, autonomy, and intimate groups overshadow the broader, somewhat nebulous concept of collective effort.

The post-1980 communication bridge has crumbled. Orchid societies, in their current form, tend to cater predominantly to their pre-millennial members, communicating in ways that don't resonate with younger audiences.

NEED FOR ADAPTATION

Societies face a crossroads. They can either cater to an aging demographic with dwindling resources or pivot and adapt to rejuvenate their membership base. Especially, shows and magazines easily slip into danger zone. Membership magazines, with their declining circulation, are becoming a financial strain. Moreover, finding skilled editors willing to work for mostly minimal compensation is a challenge. Organising shows demands a significant volunteer force and passionate enthusiasts.

Without innovation and rethinking, orchid societies risk becoming relics of the past. The allure that once drew older generations to orchids and society activities no longer resonates with newer generations. So, how can orchid societies evolve?

FINDING A NEW PURPOSE

If the current way of working is not attracting new members, then we obviously need to offer something new. Here is an example: the hobby's narrative can shift from merely admiring thriving orchids at home to raising awareness of the looming threat of biodiversity loss and the destruction of orchid habitats and actively participating in orchid conservation, also at homes. The ongoing climate change provides a compelling backdrop, offering both motivation and support for awareness.

While few can venture to biodiversity-rich regions, everyone can contribute on a grassroots level, and collective efforts can make a difference. Practically, societies can inspire members to champion the survival of specific orchid species. Encouraging younger members to either nurture five endangered orchid species at home or contribute to local habitat conservation can be a starting point. Schools can take here an important role.

As roles become defined, communication becomes paramount. Societies can act as hubs, coordinating conservation efforts and tracking progress. The digital age offers tools to facilitate this, but tailored software for coordination and reporting helps or is even essential.

This sifting focus should permeate society activities and information dissemination. While a few societies can spearhead these efforts on a pilot basis, a unified approach across the orchid community is crucial.

Current shows, though commercially successful, paint a rosy picture, often glossing over the grim reality of orchids in the wild. While these events captivate audiences with vibrant displays, they seldom hint at the species that are vanishing or have already been lost. It may be audacious to disrupt this format, introducing elements that might unsettle visitors. Yet, shows remain a potent medium to engage and convey crucial messages.

MARKETING FOR THE FUTURE

The ultimate goal is clear: engage the younger generations. The responsibility lies with the current members and their governing bodies. Crafting a successful marketing campaign demands clear message, objectives, a strategic action plan, dedicated resources, and time. The concern is that many societies might be late to the game.

To resonate with potential enthusiasts, the message must be tailored to the target audience. For example, if we pivot to the "save the orchids" narrative, it might resonate with the TikTok-savvy youth. This generation, bearing the brunt of environmental neglect, might find a personal stake in the plight of orchids. While it's not the most pressing environmental issue, it offers a tangible avenue for individual impact.

Plant hobbyists in their 30s and 40s used to be the main source of new members. Not so much now. The narrative of nurturing orchids at home might still be appealing. Exotic house plants are clearly a trend. There is no reason to exclude orchids. The challenge is to understand the hesitance to join societies. Without this knowledge, there is little point in going any further. Now we only know that something else the societies currently offer is needed.

Defining the target audience streamlines and economises outreach efforts. Digital advertising tools, like Google Ads, can target specific demographics. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp might appeal to those in their 40s, while younger audiences might frequent Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), Snapchat, and many others.

Short video content is crucial. For platforms like YouTube, videos should be concise, ideally between 5-10 minutes. Interactive content, like games or quizzes, can engage users and highlight gaps in their orchid knowledge.