

shipping from South Carolina (several hundred dollars). This gives us the following estimates: to plants costing less than \$15, add \$3; to plants costing \$15 to \$20, add \$2; to plants costing \$25, add \$1; and to plants costing \$30 and up, there will be no additional charge. As an example, let's say that I want to order the bare root *Asconopsis Irene Dobkin 'Elmhurst'* HCC/AOS (and I actually do) which is listed at \$10.50, my price will be \$13.50 CDN. These are of course estimates and subject to slight changes.

All orders must be paid at the September meeting. Cheques should be made out to the Ottawa Orchid Society. Unpaid plants will unfortunately not be ordered. If you cannot attend the September meeting, please contact our Program Chair, Julie Mertens, at (613) 323-0460 or by e-mail at julie_mertens@videotron.ca, to make arrangements. You can also contact Julie if you have any questions or require clarifications.

Plants will be delivered to Julie's house the week before our October meeting, at which time they will be packaged according to orders to be delivered to you during our meeting on October 21, 2007. Again, those unable to make that meeting are asked to contact Julie to make alternate arrangements.

The discovery of *Phragmipedium kovachii* has excited many in the orchid community resulting in a race to be the first to make this orchid available to orchid growers throughout the world. Crosses are being made as quickly as this can be done. There is no doubt that we will see some fantastic plants in the years ahead with orchid flowers never seen before. However, behind the scene, habitats are being stripped of a natural treasure much like what took place when European conquerors first invaded South and Central America beginning in the 1500's and repeated throughout the centuries. A lot of parallels can be drawn between what took place then and what is happening now.

PHRAGMIPEDIUM KOVACHII



Fig. 1: Alfredo Manrique with *Phrag. kovachii*

Photographed above next to a *Phragmipedium kovachii* is Alfredo Manrique, owner of Centro de Jardineria Manrique (CJM) in Lima, Peru. In May, 2003, Alfredo Manrique was the first person chosen by the Peruvian Ministry of Natural Resources (INRENA) to artificially propagate the magnificent and stunning *Phragmipedium kovachii*. INRENA gave Alfredo permission to collect five *Phrag. kovachii* plants in their natural habitat, just weeks before that habitat was completely depleted of all *Phrag. kovachii*, an estimated 2000 to 3000 mature plants and thousands of seedlings. CJM entered into joint ventures with Glen Decker from Piping Rock Orchids (USA), Fritz Schomburg from Tropical Propagation (USA), and Peter Croezen of Green Canyon Orchids (Canada) to grow and distribute plants of *Phrag. kovachii* and *Phrag. kovachii* hybrids worldwide.

For the USA, Europe and Asia: Piping Rock Orchids <http://www.pipingrockorchids.com/>
For Canada: Green Canyon Orchids <http://home.golden.net/~orchids>



Figure 2: *Phragmipedium kovachii*. The flower of *Phragmipedium kovachii* has a horizontal spread of up to 8 inches (11 – 15 cm.) and ranges in color from pink to royal purple.

History: *Phrag. kovachii* was discovered by Faustina Medina Bautista in October, 2001 on or near his farm near Moyobamba and Chachapoyas in northern Peru. The first documented illegal appearance of *Phrag. kovachii* was at the May 17-19, 2002 Redland International Orchid Show in Miami, Florida. An unspecified Peruvian nursery owner is rumored to have been offering it for sale at \$10,000 per plant. A little while later on May 26, 2002 Virginian J. Michael Kovach purchased 3 plants from Bautista at his roadside orchid kiosk. He brought one plant back to the United States which he took to Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota Florida on June 5, 2002. A formal description was immediately written by two staff members of Selby's Orchid Identification Center, J.T. Atwood & S. Dalstron, and one Peruvian reviewer, R. Fernandez. It was issued on June 12, 2002 as a supplement to *Selbyana*, the Gardens' scientific publication. This beat the publication by Eric Christenson in *Orchids*, which was published June 17, 2002, by five days. The tale of the upheaval that followed Selby's description of an obviously illegally-imported plant is well-covered in "The Case of the Purloined Orchid," by C. Pittman (2005).

The Peruvian Government hoped to have the most important orchid species to be found in the Neotropics in the last 100 years named after the country where it was found, *Phragmipedium peruvianum* but this was not to be.

Plant Habit

- Leaves: up to 55 cm long, 5 cm wide, hard, leathery, with occasional basal purple-red coloration
- Inflorescence: 1-3 flowered, blooms sequential, 20-40 cm long
- Bloom: 15-23 cm wide, after opening it grows and lightens in color, ovary 8-9 mm wide, 8-11 cm long

Habitat Data

- Distribution - near Moyobamba and Tarapoto, Peru, elevation: 1900-2000 m.; peak flowering in the wild: October-March [probably]
- Ecology: steep limestone cliff faces lacking blanketing vegetation; mean temperature range: 16-17°C
- Light: partial sun, from Koopowitz (2003): "The cliff was unshaded by trees and thus the plants were growing in exposed sunlight."
- Medium: calcareous, pH 6.97, on moss over brown, gravelly soil, roots within a few cm of the soil surface

- Water: constant moisture, from Koopowitz (2003): "This was not the rainy season. It had only rained twice this day."

Currently, there are only 15 legally collected plants of *Phrag. kovachii* in cultivation in three Peruvian nurseries. These three nurseries were given permission by the Peruvian government to collect 5 plants apiece for use in artificial propagation. However, thousands of plants have been illegally collected and exported all over the world, especially to the United States and Europe.

The first legal plants were collected by Alfredo Manrique, owner of Centro de Jardineria Manrique. Centro de Jardineria Manrique partnered with Piping Rock Orchids of Galway, New York, Tropical Propagations of Madison, Wisconsin, and Green Canyon Orchids of Canada to breed species and hybrid seedlings from these plants. Piping Rock Orchids will oversee worldwide distribution (except for Canada, for which Green Canyon Orchids is responsible.). The first species and hybrid flasks and hybrid seedlings were offered for sale at orchid shows in Spring 2006. The first widespread advertisement by Piping Rock of species and hybrid seedlings appeared in the August 2006 Orchids magazine.

The second group of plants was collected for propagation by Peruflora. The flasks resulting from the breeding of these plants were first made available for sale at the 2005 World Orchid Conference in Dijon, France. Flasks have since been offered for sale all over the world. However, anyone who purchased flasks from Peruflora was required to sign a contract promising not to sell, trade or donate any seedlings until February 15, 2007. This contract was issued by the nursery, Peruflora, and was in no way connected with INRENA, the branch of the Peruvian government concerned with overseeing the legal propagation of *Phrag. kovachii*. The contract is suspected to be a way for Peruflora to maintain a monopoly on flask and seedling sales for as long as possible.

The third group of plants was collected by Vivero Nuevo Destino, the nursery of Lee & Chady Moore.

The first US nursery to offer *Phrag. kovachii* seedlings from Peruflora for sale was Orchids Limited of Plymouth, Minnesota. They were offered as "futures," to be delivered in April 2007. Prices for individual plants were \$225-\$500 (including overnight shipping), depending on the seedling size at the time of delivery. A 50% non-refundable deposit was required to reserve a seedling and if the company could not fulfill the order, the deposit was issued as store-credit rather than a refund. This offer by Orchids Limited was viewed by some as gouging on a scale never previously heard of in the American orchid community. In response to criticism posted on the Slipper Orchid Forum, Jerry Lee Fischer states that, "Now as to costs. I am charging a price which includes overnight shipping. \$225.00 is not a great deal of money when you consider that I have already spent well over \$11,000.00 for 8 flasks (this includes transportation and trip costs). I also spent 4 days of travel time plus another 4 days getting the whole trip arranged. I am presently paid anywhere between \$175.00 to \$350.00 per hour when I do consulting work for hobbyists or commercial nurseries. This work supplements our income so my time is worth something as well. I am also spending 2 years of effort and care to grow these plants to the best of my ability. Next time you go out to a fancy restaurant and spend \$200.00 on a meal what do you have the next day? Surely an interesting orchid plant is worth more than that." The total retail price of the futures being offered by Orchids limited was \$75,000

The second US nursery to offer *Phrag. kovachii* seedlings from Peruflora to be delivered in early 2007 was Flasks by Chuck Acker. These seedlings were offered in batches of 5 for a far more reasonable price of \$100 per seedling. A 50% deposit was required at the time of purchase, but would be refunded if the company could not fulfill the order.

In 2006, Piping Rock Orchids was selling flasks of *Phrag. kovachii* with 12-15 seedlings for \$225 (US); flasks with 25-30 seedlings for \$400 (US); and individual seedlings in 2 ¼ in. pots for \$100 (US). *Phrag. kovachii* hybrid seedlings were being sold at \$75 (US) each.



Fig. 3: Glen Decker, owner of Piping Rock Orchids holding a *Phragmipedium kovachii*

In August 2006, Piping Rock Orchids was selling 3”– 4” seedlings of *Phrag. kovachii* for approx. \$100 (US) and was optimistic that many of these plants would be blooming by the Spring of 2007. The average size of flowers is 7” but the largest flower they have had was 9.5 inches across. There tend to be 1-3 flowers per inflorescence and the “Laura” parent they are using is blooming twice a year.

According to Glen Decker of Piping Rock Orchids, they are the first American nursery to be actively propagating and hybridizing *Phrag. kovachii*. This has been a project that they had been working on since May of 2003, when Alfredo Manrique, owner of Centro de Jardineria Manrique, Lima, Peru, was granted the first permit to collect the five plants that they are presently working with. Since that time, three companies have formed an exclusive partnership for the US, European and Asian markets to make this all happen, one from Peru and the other two from the United States. This partnership is comprised of Centro de Jardineria Manrique - owner, Alfredo Manrique, Piping Rock Orchids - owner, Glen Decker, and Tropical Propagations - owner, Fritz Schomburg. There is a separate partnership between Peter Croezen of Green Canyon Orchids International in Canada with Alfredo Manrique to sell *Phrag. kovachii* in Canada. After countless meetings between Alfredo and INRENA officials in Peru, Fritz and Decker returned from Peru with 24 mother flasks: 10 flasks of *kovachii* sibs and selfings and 14 flasks of different *kovachii* hybrids. After the arrival of the 24 "mother" flasks, Fritz Schomburg began the task of replating the seedlings at his lab, Tropical Propagations in Madison, Wisconsin. Many of these mother flasks contain thousands of plants and there is an expectation that there will be an excellent supply of most of the crosses produced. Based on how long the seedlings have been in the mother flasks, it is apparent that the species is growing slower than the hybrids.

Based on germination and growth rates, Glen Decker expects the following crosses to be the first hybrids for sale in 2006:

- Phrag. Haley Decker = *Phragmipedium* (*kovachii* x Saint Ouen) (Saint Ouen = Hanne Popow x *besseae*)
- Phrag. Suzanne Decker = *Phragmipedium* (*kovachii* x Cape Sunset) (Cape Sunset = Eric Young x *schlimii*)
- Phrag. Fritz Schomburg = *Phragmipedium* (*kovachii* x *besseae*)

Phragmipedium kovachii x Living Fire (Living Fire = Sorcerer's Apprentice x besseae)
Phragmipedium kovachii x Walter Schomburg (Walter Schomburg = Eric Young x Andean Fire)

Canadians who wish to purchase Phragmipedium kovachii flasks please contact Green Canyon Orchids, see <http://home.golden.net/~orchids>



Fig. 4: Phrag. Haley Decker

Fig. 4 is a photograph of Phrag. Haley Decker (April 12, 2007). The natural spread of the flower is just under 14 cm. (approx. 5.5 inches); petal width is just under 5 cm. It is expected that the flowers of a more mature plant will be bigger. This hybrid is named after Glen Decker's daughter, Haley.

In the December 2003 issue of Orchid Digest magazine, Harold Koopowitz wrote an interesting article about his visit to Peru to document and photograph a recently discovered patch of Phragmipedium Kovachii. News followed soon after from a Peruvian grower that this patch, as with three other locations discovered earlier, had been stripped bare of these magnificent orchids. The following is the first part of a lengthy posting by Olaf Gruss on the Orchid Spring Discussion Board on Tuesday, December 23, 2003. In Olaf's posting it is not clear which bits (if any) were written by Olaf, and which bits were written by Lee Moore.

Dear Orchidfriends:

Today I get from a friend a very interesting but also horrible story about Phrag. kovachii. The original mail was written by Lee Moore and sent to many orchidists all over the world.

I have just returned from my farm in Moybamba this week and what I am going to relate to you about what I have seen and discovered on this trip will shock and enrage you.

I happened to return to my hotel at lunchtime with my friend, Manuel Camacho who is a local orchid enthusiast and guide to the Phragmipedium kovachii sites. We noticed a double cabin pick truck parked near the door of our hotel. What we saw in this pickup shocked us both and we could not believe what we were seeing!

There were 7 large rice and coffee sacks stuffed full with several hundred of the largest P. kovachii that we have ever seen with leaves fully 2-3 feet long sticking out the tops of the sacks with no attempt to hide them. I wanted to take a video or photo but I had left my cameras at the farm and was helpless.

My wife had seen the farmer Faustino Medina hanging around the hotel earlier and asked why he was here. He just said he came to see some friends. Faustino is the original discoverer of Phragmipedium kvachii and now we know why he was hanging around our hotel. We had heard rumors about a new site being found and now it was confirmed because the previous four sites have been totally wiped out.

It was just a coincidence and a one time chance that we happened to come in while the truck was parked at the hotel to see this contraband. This makes me wonder how many others that we did not have the chance to see. Since it was Saturday, we could not report this to INRENA to have this man detained. I took down his license, etc. and found out from the hotel reception who he was and that he lived in Tarapoto. I also learned that he comes to Moyobamba very often and does the same thing. So he checked out with his truckload of *Phragmipedium kovachii* and went on his way with no one to stop him. We went to Tarapoto on Monday to make the denouncement to INRENA about this atrocity. Guess what? All government offices in Peru had shut down totally until the 6th of January for summer vacations. Only in Peru do things like this happen. The whole government shuts down for 3 weeks...can you believe this?

Anyway, I found that there had been an exhibition of the famous new and most 'valuable' orchid in the world at a downtown hotel and was featured on the local TV the week before. Incidentally, INRENA, said or did nothing about this. After investigating this, I found that the exhibitor had been the owner of the pickup truck, Ing. Kenneth Reategui who had a small recreational park and restaurant on the outskirts of town. I went there in hopes of getting some pictures as evidence. After paying my entrance fee of 1 Sol to this abandoned park, I asked the young boy that seemed to be in charge about these new special slipper orchids. He said that Mr. Kenneth brought a lot of them in the other day but has taken them all to a big orchid dealer in Lima.

Also, we learned that a few weeks after Koopowitz visited the last known site that was teaming with *P. kovachii* about which he wrote in the *Orchidist*, a helicopter with cargo boxes on the skids, came in to pick up an unknown large quantity in sacks. The helicopter did not land at the site but picked them up on the road after they had been brought out by 'orchid enthusiasts'. We have the name of the helicopter company and the registration number that has been reported to INRENA which has done nothing about it. We are trying to investigate this ourselves to find out who chartered that helicopter on that date to make an official denouncement with documentation.

In early September, a friend of mine went to the site which Koopowitz visited & photographed only to find it totally wiped out including all visible seedlings except for two plants that they saw very high up out of reach on the cliff which is the only reason they are still there. They took photographs of this site as it is today which I am forwarding to Koopowitz for the record. We know who did the deed because he sold several hundred to an Ecuadorian dealer and others to a dealer in Lima. He offered 200 to me which I turned down. He is Jose Mendoza, the taxi driver that took Kovach to Progresso when he got his single plant that he took to Selby for identification. We know him well because he has been our taxi driver for a couple of years until recently when we dispatched him after finding out what he was doing.

Now, a new site has been found by Faustino which also is quickly going the way of the Dodo Bird. These statements are fact and not rumor because we live there and know everyone and almost everything that is going on.

Unfortunately, the *Phragmipedium kovachii* has had a very sad history since its discovery by farmer Faustino Medina in May a year and a half ago. The first plants were sold to truck drivers and tourists on the side of the road as pretty flowering plants for less than a dollar. Naturally, they never would have survived in such hands. Then along came Villena who bought up all she could get her hands on and then Kovach got his single plant left over after Villena left.

Farmer Faustino had found two sites which were quickly wiped out. My wife was able to get a hold of some of these for our nursery before they were all gone. But these were sabotaged by a local jealous 'orchid enthusiast' in an attempt to keep us out of the future market. Most of these died but we were able to salvage a few of these which are growing well now. Then farmer Juan found two more sites which were also quickly wiped out. The second site being the one that Koopowitz visited and wrote about but is now gone with the wind. And now comes farmer Faustino with another recent find which will not last very long. I only saw ONE pickup truck load going out. How many more have I not seen and are yet to go out until those are also wiped out? This last site will not see the New Year.
