

Preface

Madagascar has one of the richest and most distinctive orchid floras anywhere in the world. The island boasts almost 1000 species in 57 genera; 17% of the genera and nearly 90% of the species are endemic. Visitors to the island are almost certain to see orchids on their visit. The well-known nature reserves and parks are rich in orchid species. Some orchids are spectacular but most are cryptic and grow in shady places under trees and shrubs or on the trunks and branches of trees in the woods and forests. A good pair of binoculars and a $\times 10$ magnifying lens are particularly useful tools when trying to find and identify orchids.

The origin of this field guide can be traced to a joint project on Madagascar's threatened plants between the Parc Tsimbazaza in Antananarivo and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, which was funded by the Friends and Foundation of Kew. Orchids were one of the three target groups, the others being palms and succulents. Detailed field and propagation studies were undertaken on a select number of threatened orchid species, with a view to their eventual re-introduction. Re-introducing orchids is not simple, especially when the number of plants in the wild has been reduced to less than 50, as was the case for several of the target species. With a narrow genetic base, it is important to breed with the right plants from the appropriate populations and to find appropriate means of raising the seedlings to maturity. It is also necessary to understand the ecology of the orchid well before re-introduction can occur. Finally, re-introduction must be followed by protection and monitoring to assess the success or otherwise of the project.

In the course of these studies, we visited many protected areas. Our guides were, almost to a man, keen to learn more about orchids but lacked any guide books with easily understood text and good photographs. The two parts of Henri Perrier de la Bâthie's seminal orchid account in the *Flore de Madagascar* were published in 1939 and 1941, and have long been out-of-print. Second-hand copies, when available, fetch high prices and are well out of the range of nearly everyone. The idea of producing a field guide sprang from the perceived need of the park rangers and guides and of tourists interested in Madagascar's unique plant life, of which orchids make up nearly 10% of the total species.

We are very grateful to a number of biologists and photographers who have photographed orchids in Madagascar for allowing us to use their images for this guide. Photographers are listed on pp. 430–431 and the copyright of their images remains with them.

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Kew