

## **EOC Board Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 09.00am in Hortus Botanicus Leiden, Netherlands**

Present: G Diana, V Dumont, C Hermans (Minute Taker), J Hermans, D Lafarge (Secretary General), A Matikka (via Zoom) & F-J Richardt.

Guest: D Diana, M Dumont & A Richardt

### **1. Welcome**

Board Members were welcomed by Mr Lafarge, and he thanked Mr van Vugt for the garden tour and hosting the meeting. Mr Lafarge then stated the council's appreciation of the work of the late Gab van Winkel for the EOC, in particular the creation and running of the article exchange. He informed the Board that he had passed on the messages of condolence to the family. In addition, Mr Lafarge informed the meeting of the death of Jac (Koos) Wubben the previous week and that his private orchid collection will go to botanic gardens in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany.

### **2. Apologies: None.**

### **3. Minutes of the Dresden Board Meeting 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 & Matters Arising**

The Minutes of the Board Meeting in Dresden on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were unanimously approved. There were no matters arising.

### **4. Financial Report**

Dr Matikka presented the spreadsheet of Membership Fees. Only eight invoices had been sent for 2023 as the majority had already paid. It was noted there was an outstanding amount owed by Association France-Orchidées. It was agreed that as Polskie Towarzystwa Miłośników Storzyczków had still not responded they will be considered resigned at the 2024 AGM.

### **5. Administrative Issues**

Mr Lafarge reported that there had been no contact from Post Finance.

### **6. Members**

Mrs Dumont reported that Fondation Orchidée (FO) will cease in 2024. In addition, Mr Lafarge reported that Association Francophone pour le Jugement d'Orchidées, (AFJO) will be merging with Fédération France Orchidées (FFO) in 2024.

### **7. Potential New Members**

Mr Lafarge reported that Hortus Botanicus, Leiden may join but Jardin du Luxembourg/Sénat France although supported by the gardeners is unlikely to become a member for political reasons. However, the botanic garden in Rouen, France were interested, and Manuel Lucas Garcia is creating a new orchidarium in Andalusia and will become a member as well as Estepona continuing its membership.

### **8. Status EOC Dresden 2024 (20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024)**

Mr Richardt reported that there were only 10 registrants so far. It was confirmed that the WOC in Taiwan had approximately 400. It was agreed that Mr Richardt would provide the Board with the digital poster, and they would circulate it to their contacts including those in orchid research to promote the event and the poster competition. So far, only the Hungarian Orchid Society from the European orchid societies are exhibiting, despite the €1000 subsidy.

Mr Lafarge agreed to contact Massimo Morandin to remind him to do an exhibit to promote the 2027 EOC. The state of Saxony has provided €20,000 funding for reusable eco-friendly props for the show, the challenge now was to find storage for it. Commercial growers have agreed to stage a large exhibit.

Work has started on translating the Judging Handbook into English. The details of the dinner on Saturday 23 March have been finalised with the Hyperion Hotel Dresden am Schloss, drinks are included, and buses will collect participants from the five conference hotels at 7.30pm. Presentation of the Grand Champion and Best Poster prizes will be made at the event. It was agreed that Mr Lafarge will ask Monika Eckert to arrange a suitable time for the EOC Editors meeting.

### **9. WOC Trust**

Dr Hermans reported on the recent activities of the WOC Trust. See Appendix A. Dr Hermans informed the Board that the Trust was still seeking its sixth and final sponsor. She asked the Board to consider nominations for the WOC Trust Medal and send names with a supporting paragraph to her before the closing date of 1<sup>st</sup> December. In addition, she informed the Board that she had offered to assist the DOG with their WOC bid.

### **10. Status WOC 2026 Bid**

Mr Richardt reported that the state of Saxony had agreed funding for the WOC, but local elections are due in 2024. The State Secretary has already allocated €120,000 as part of the next budget as pre-financing. A small team from DOG will attend the WOC in Taiwan and the Mayor of Dresden plans to attend. Jörg Frehsonke will present the bid and Ghiseler Cramer will be the lead for the WOC with Bernd and Marlene Treder assisting. The team are not frightened of the two year run in as the EOC will be good preparation. Anthura has already agreed to do an exhibit of hardy orchids for the WOC.

The Board agreed that it would be a good idea to add information in the bid document about possible trips to see wild orchids in countries such as Sicily, Greece, Malta, Portugal at the time of the WOC. Mr Lafarge agreed to contact a leader of orchids tours he knows to see if he would be interested in leading a tour and then provide his details to the WOC bid team. Other suggestions of places to visit for delegates to be included are the botanic gardens with orchid collections in Europe such as Leiden, Kiel. The Board also agreed that Mr Lafarge should provide an official letter in support of the bid.

### **11. Opening of new Board positions**

Mr Lafarge confirmed that there were two positions vacant on the Board. After the next AGM Mr Morandin will be joining the Board as President of the EOC. Mr Lafarge reported that Mr Garcia was keen to join the Board and he could manage the article exchange. The Board supported the suggestion. It was agreed to seek out potential new members for the Board at the AGM.

Mrs Dumont indicated that she wanted to step down in the near future. It was agreed that she would be proposed for renewal at the AGM for another 3-year term but might not serve the whole term. This would help spread the date of members' reappointment. The other member for re-election is Mr Hermans.

### **12. Update on EOC Website**

It was agreed to circulate the list of non-working e-mails of EOC members to the Board to see if they could provide up to date ones. Dr Matikka reported that the appreciation of Gab van Winkle is on the website and that eight new articles had been uploaded.

### **13. EOC Archives from Rik Neyrinck**

The now digitised EOC archives will be hosted on the website with access granted to Board members only.

### **14. Status EOC Italy 2027**

An e-mail had been received from Mr Morandin informing the Board of a change in venue for the EOC in Italy in 2007 from Florence to Bologna. The venue is a speciality for food, called FICO (<https://www.fico.it/it>). It will be the same organising team and was better financially for the Italian Orchid Association and hotels are on site. The move was approved by the Board, but it was agreed that Mr Morandin needed to ensure there was no clash in dates with of the Dresden show. It was agreed that Mr Lafarge would write to him regarding this and confirm if lecture facilities were available and ask for the proposed dates.

### **15. Next Board Meeting Spring 2024**

It was agreed to meet during the EOC at Dresden Show (20<sup>th</sup> March to 24<sup>th</sup> March) on **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> March at 10.30am room tbc**. It was also agreed to have Zoom facilities at the meeting. Mr Lafarge agreed to confirm arrangements.

### **16. Next AGM Meeting Spring 2024**

It was agreed to meet during the EOC at Dresden Show (20<sup>th</sup> March to 24<sup>th</sup> March) on **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 13.30pm room tbc**. It was also agreed to have Zoom facilities at the meeting. Mr Lafarge agreed to confirm arrangements.

### **17. Any Other Business.**

Dr Matikka's article titled 'The Challenge of Orchid Societies', see Appendix B, had been circulated to the Board and was due to be published in the French, German, and Italian orchid magazines and on the EOC website. It was agreed to have it as a topic for a brainstorming session either as a standalone event or at the end of the AGM in Dresden. Dr Matikka would provide a short introduction and Mr Lafarge would be the moderator.

Mr Lafarge agreed to circulate the document to delegates in the next few weeks with information about the location and date of the AGM and the advert for the EOC.

It was agreed to remind delegates at the AGM that they needed to be careful with vendor selection at shows with regard to reports of plants being sold under the table.

Meeting started at 10.20am after the garden visit and closed at 12.15pm.

Clare Hermans

**Appendix A**  
**Report for the EOC Board 28th October 2023 on the WOC Trust**  
**Clare Hermans**

Since the last EOC Board meeting the WOC Trust Board has continued to meet monthly by Zoom. The focus has been on assisting TOGA who are organising the next WOC and promoting the event in orchid journals around the world. In addition, a subgroup of members of the WOC Trust Board have been working on the English version of the Judging Handbook.

A volunteer, Hendrik Venter, has been appointed to moderate the content of the WOC Trust Facebook page and a Facebook page for WOCT donations has been set up.

A WOC Trust Keynote Speaker has been invited, Professor Chia-Wei Li, CEO of Dr. Cecilia Koo Botanic Conservation Center (KBCC).

Work is ongoing on compiling an Activities Schedule During a World Orchid Conference.

In addition, the following were agreed and published on the WOC Trust website:

- A WOC Trust Medal and Donor Policy
- Judging Criteria for abstracts and posters at a WOC
- A Copyright / License Agreement and Personal Release form for the Taiwan Proceedings

## Appendix B

# THE CHALLENGE 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.*

*Not all societies are equal, though. While too many orchid societies have had their story told, there are thriving societies with growing membership from which others can obviously learn. These tend to be relatively newborn or focused on a limited sector of the orchid hobby. Whilst we are very pleased with this expansion, this article concentrates on those societies that are in difficulty.*

Orchids first captivated the public in the late 19th century. This era, marked by a fascination for spectacular and novel flora, saw breeding experiments and a race to discover new species, all backed by affluent patrons. The allure of orchids led to the emergence of hobby clubs and expanding commercial supply chain. Orchids, with their mystique, were not just plants; they were symbols of luxury and elitism.

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, exhibitions and magazines easily slip into danger zone. Organising exhibitions demands a significant volunteer force and passionate enthusiasts. 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.

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. 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 exhibitions, 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, exhibitions 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 economizes 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. *More suggestions in the box.*

### **BUYING TIME BY REIMAGINING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

While awaiting the new approach that will change everything, we must act to preserve at least the current status quo. The digital migration of members challenges traditional revenue streams.

Societies must either diversify income sources or curtail expenses.

Activities should pivot to online platforms and occasional in-person events. If membership wanes, printed magazines, with their associated costs, might become unsustainable. This especially true in multilingual countries. If we want to rejuvenate the membership, printed magazines are not the way to do it. They are becoming an economic burden and, what is most important, the younger generation is not interested in printed text. It's a big leap to move to web-based publication and the move is sure to drop out members, so the timing and the execution must be well thought out.

Transitioning to online articles can reduce expenses, potentially allowing for a reduced membership fee. While charging for online content might be unrealistic, fostering a community through comments and discussions can be invaluable.

Short video clips, especially member-generated content – show us your orchid collection – can foster community engagement. A closed community platform might lower the inhibition to share personal orchid experiences compared to public platforms like Facebook.

While many might be familiar with local orchid populations, offering free online care guides can reach a broader audience. Engaging the passive audience of home growers will benefit of innovative strategies, like photo competitions ("Orchid of the Month" awards). However, instead of a rigorous judging process, the focus should be on mass engagement, excluding seasoned growers.

Traditional members' meetings have seen dwindling attendance, not necessarily due to a lack of interest, but perhaps because of changing lifestyles and priorities. Instead of frequent meetings, societies could pivot to fewer, more impactful one-day events with comprehensive agendas.

Encouraging localized small group activities can foster community spirit, especially if led by passionate individuals. Providing online access to meetings can cater to members who face logistical challenges in attending in-person events, ensuring inclusivity.

Exhibitions remain a cornerstone of society activities. They serve as a testament to the society's vibrancy and are instrumental in promoting the orchid hobby. Depending on the resources at hand, these can range from intimate bazaars to grand orchid showcases. When executed effectively, they can also be significant revenue generators.

### **CALL TO COLLECTIVE BRAINSTORMING**

Though, it is always a few key persons that are willing to sacrifice a lot of their time for the society to thrive, it is crucial to involve all members in charting the future course of the hobby. The orchid nurseries are built on the orchid hobby in mutual dependence. Basically, so are also scientific collections and research.

Opening discussions on attracting new members and diversifying revenue streams can yield innovative ideas. The collective wisdom of the community, from seasoned growers especially to novices, can provide fresh perspectives and drive the society towards a vibrant future. A more comprehensive picture of the current situation is needed. The European Orchid Council could be the actor that provides a platform for discussion, coordinates, and shares the ideas generated.

*It will take great minds to find viable ways to redefine orchid society. The current concept is challenged. The new one must be accepted by new target groups. Without a clear focus, all marketing efforts will be in vain.*

**SUGGESTIONS:**

**Potential Partnerships:** Collaborate with botanical gardens, conservation organisations, and educational institutions. These partnerships can amplify reach, share resources, and co-host events.

**Influencer Collaborations:** Engage with plant influencers on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Their endorsement can introduce orchid societies to a vast and engaged audience, especially the younger demographic.

**Community-Driven Initiatives:** Launch initiatives like "Orchid Grower of the Month" or "Conservation Champion" to encourage member participation and showcase their efforts.

**Education:** Introduce orchid cultivation as part of biology or horticulture courses in schools or organise workshops in educational institutions.

**Interactive Learning:** Use Augmented Reality (AR) or Virtual Reality (VR) for virtual garden tours or to explain orchid anatomy.

**Events & Celebrations:** Collaborate with shopping or community centres for temporary displays or pop-up sales.

**Themed Events:** Organise events around specific themes like "Orchids Around the World" or "Orchids in Art & Culture".

**Youth Council:** Form a committee of younger members to give insights into what their age group would like from the society.

**Feedback Loops:** Regularly solicit feedback from members and attendees of events. This feedback can guide future activities, ensuring they align with members' interests and the changing dynamics of the hobby.

**Leveraging Technology:** Embrace digital tools for communication, event management, and member engagement. Consider developing a mobile app for the society, offering features like care guides, and event calendars.

**Content creation:** Use EOC's article collection and share your own articles through it. Use ChatGPT and other AI tools to produce articles or assist in writing content.

**Virtual Workshops & Webinars:** Invite experts to host online sessions about orchid care, new species, or historical aspects.

**Workgroups:** form various workgroups where members specialise on growing the same selected species, maybe parallel to their own collection. The group members share experiences, collect data that is relevant to their response species and publish their achievements through the society channels. So, the society is structured by interest areas instead of geographical location. Schools could adopt the same method.

**Collaborations & Partnerships:** Collaborate with local businesses for discounts or mutual promotions. Form alliances with other orchid societies globally to share resources and knowledge.

**Continuous Adaptation:** The world is evolving rapidly, and so are hobbies. Regularly reassess the society's strategies, be open to change, and adapt to the shifting landscape.