

The New Refugium Botanicum

Figures and Descriptions from Living Specimens of Little Known or New Plants of Botanical Interest at Lankester Botanical Garden, University of Costa Rica.

By Franco Pupulin

THE *REFUGIUM BOTANICUM*, edited by W. Wilson Saunders (1809–1879) and printed in London between 1869 and 1872, represents a classical example of the fine nineteenth-century books on plants. Its long title, *Refugium Botanicum or Figures and Descriptions From Living Specimens, of Little Known or New Plants of Botanical Interest*, reflected the editor's intent to present interesting plants of botanical merit to his readers. All plants were studied and illustrated by the best specialists from living specimens and accompanied by concise cultural notes. Saunders' opus was a literary "botanical refuge," a kind of romantic repository of species that were seldom, if ever, shown to the public through plant magazines because of their inconspicuous habit or rarity in general cultivation.



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The first part of volume 2 of *Refugium Botanicum*, which was entirely devoted to orchids, appeared at the beginning of 1870. The botanical descriptions of this volume were prepared by the time's leading orchidologist, Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach, or Reichenbach the son (filius, 1824–1889). The renowned Scottish illustrator, Walter Hood Fitch (1817–1892), was in charge of creating the accurate botanical plates. Since 1840, Fitch had been the sole artist for all official and unofficial publications issued by Kew Royal Botanical Gardens and, among other things, had painted the beautiful illustrations for James Bateman's *A Monograph of Odontoglossum* (1864–1874) and created more than 500 plates for Hooker's *Icones Plantarum* (1836–1876). He was also the editor of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*. Saunders himself added short but useful notes on the cultural requirements of each of the species portrayed in the *Refugium Botanicum*. The texts of the *Refugium Botanicum* were lucid and technically impeccable; however, they were not scientifically austere. The exquisite sketches and the brief comments on culture distilled from Saunders' lifetime career as a grower

made the series an extraordinary work that survived time.

It may seem strange, in the era of molecular biology, to resurrect the romantic spirit of the *Refugium Botanicum*. There are, however, good reasons to do so. The envisioned method of this work is something we are accustomed to following at Lankester Botanical Garden. We proudly study living specimens whenever possible, illustrating and describing them as such. Thanks to the collaboration of an excellent illustrator, Sylvia Strigari, we have an artist who has made beautiful portraits of our plants since 2007. In most cases, the plants are little known, though not completely new to the science. For this reason, we are inaugurating a *New Refugium Botanicum*, which is aimed at presenting illustrations (both watercolor and ink plates) and descriptions of living specimens that are interesting from a botanical point of view, and grown in the vast collections of the Lankester Botanical Garden at the University of Costa Rica.

The series, which will eventually take the shape of a book, mainly focuses on species from the Neotropical region. These species are the specialty of orchid researchers at Lankester Botanical Garden, but interesting plants from other tropical regions are featured as well. In our portraits, we incorporate all the new evidence to improve the understanding of the unrevealed diversity of orchids, including data from morphology, ecology, anatomy, DNA and pollination. I will personally edit the *New Refugium Botanicum*, contributing some of the texts and botanical illustrations in ink. Other texts and illustrations will be contributed by Diego Bogarín, Robert L. Dressler, Melania Fernández, Adam Karremans, Christina Smith, Melissa Díaz and other researchers and research assistants at Lankester Botanical Garden. Notes on species culture will be distilled by the unequalled experience of our gardeners, who are responsible for a collection of some 30,000 orchid specimens. Sylvia Strigari will be the artist responsible for all of the botanical watercolors.

We hope that the readers of the magazine will appreciate the mix of cutting-edge science and horticulture

provided by this series, and will enjoy this window on the botanical refuge created by the University of Costa Rica at Lankester Botanical Garden.

—Franco Pupulin is a specialist in the systematics and taxonomy of Neotropical orchids. He works as a Senior Research Professor with the Universidad de Costa Rica, where he is Head of Research at the Lankester Botanical Garden and the Editor-in-Chief of *Lankesteriana*, the only international journal exclusively devoted to scientific orchidology. Franco is associated in research with the Harvard University Herbaria and the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Universidad de Costa Rica, Jardín Botánico Lankester, Costa Rica; Harvard University Herbaria, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota, Florida (franco.pupulin@gmail.com).

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