

Brachionidium alpestre Luer & Vásquez, sp. nov.

Ety.: From the Latin *alpestris*, "of high altitude," referring to the area of the habitat.

Planta grandis erecta rhizomate crasso vaginis furfuraceis, flore grandi pulcherrimo, sepalo mediano synsepaloque ovatis acuminatis undulatis minutissime ciliatis, sepalo mediano tri-nervis et labello crasso late trapeziformi callosso obtuso.

Plant large, epiphytic to terrestrial, erect, up to 25 cm tall, the rhizome stout, occasionally branching, 2-4 cm long between ramicauls, enclosed by 3 scurfy, tubular sheaths, mucronate at the apex and fimbriate along the lower margin; roots coarse from the base. Ramicauls stout, suberect, 10-12 mm long, enclosed by 2 scurfy, tubular sheaths. **Leaf** suberect, coriaceous, denticulate above the middle, suffused with purple, elliptical, acute, 2.5-3 cm long including a petiole 2-3 mm long, 1-1.2 cm wide, longitudinally 7-veined. **Inflorescence** a solitary, showy, non-resupinate flower borne by a slender, erect peduncle 3.5-5 cm long, with a loose bract near the middle, and another at the base, from near the apex of the ramicaul; floral bract inflated, acute, verrucose, 7 mm long, enclosing the pedicel and ovary; pedicel 1 mm long, with a filament 5-6 mm long; ovary 2 mm long; **sepals** yellow, minutely ciliate, the middle sepal ovate, acute, acuminate, 35 mm long, 10 mm wide, 3-veined, the lateral sepals totally connate into an ovate, acute, acuminate, concave synsepal, 40 mm long, 20 mm wide expanded, 4-veined; **petals** yellow to red-brown, minutely ciliate, ovate, oblique, acute, acuminate, 37 mm long, 9 mm wide, 3-veined; **lip** purple, transversely trapeziform, 3.5 mm long, 6 mm wide, the lateral angles obtuse, erect, the apical margin broadly thickened, broadly rounded, shallowly retuse-apiculate, the disc with a transversely ovoid, shortly pubescent callus 1 mm wide, with a glenion; **column** stout, 1 mm long; pollinia 8.

BOLIVIA: Dept. of La Paz: Prov. of Nor Yungas, terrestrial on the road-cut west of Chuspipata, alt. 3100 m, 21 Jan. 1988, C. Luer, J. Luer, R. Vásquez & J. Solomon 12888 (Holotype: MO; Isotype: LPB); terrestrial east of the pass, alt. 2770 m, 21 Jan. 1988, C. Luer, J. Luer, R. Vásquez & C. Luer, J. Luer, R. Vásquez & J. Solomon 12914 (MO); terrestrial northeast of Chuspipata, alt. 2450 m, 29 Jan. 1984, A. Gentry & J. Solomon 44796 (MO, LPB).

This handsome species grows either epiphytically in low shrubs or terrestrially on road embankments on both sides of a high, cold and wet mountain pass in the Nor Yungas of Bolivia, where it is apparently endemic. The first known collection was made in 1984 by Al Gentry and James Solomon.

Brachionidium alpestre is most similar to the Ecuadorian *B. elegans*, from which it is distinguished by the large, verrucose floral bract; a long-acuminate, flat synsepal; petals held downward against the middle sepal; and the broad, obtuse lip.

The sheaths of the stout, erect, rhizomes and ramicauls of both species are scurfy, that is, the surfaces are covered with minute, irregular, cellular appendages. Both species are also similar to the Colombian *B. parvifolium* which has smooth sheaths, but from which they are also easily distinguished by the 3-veined middle sepal and 4-veined synsepal, instead of 5- to 7-veined and 8- or more-veined. All three of the above species possess eight pollinia.



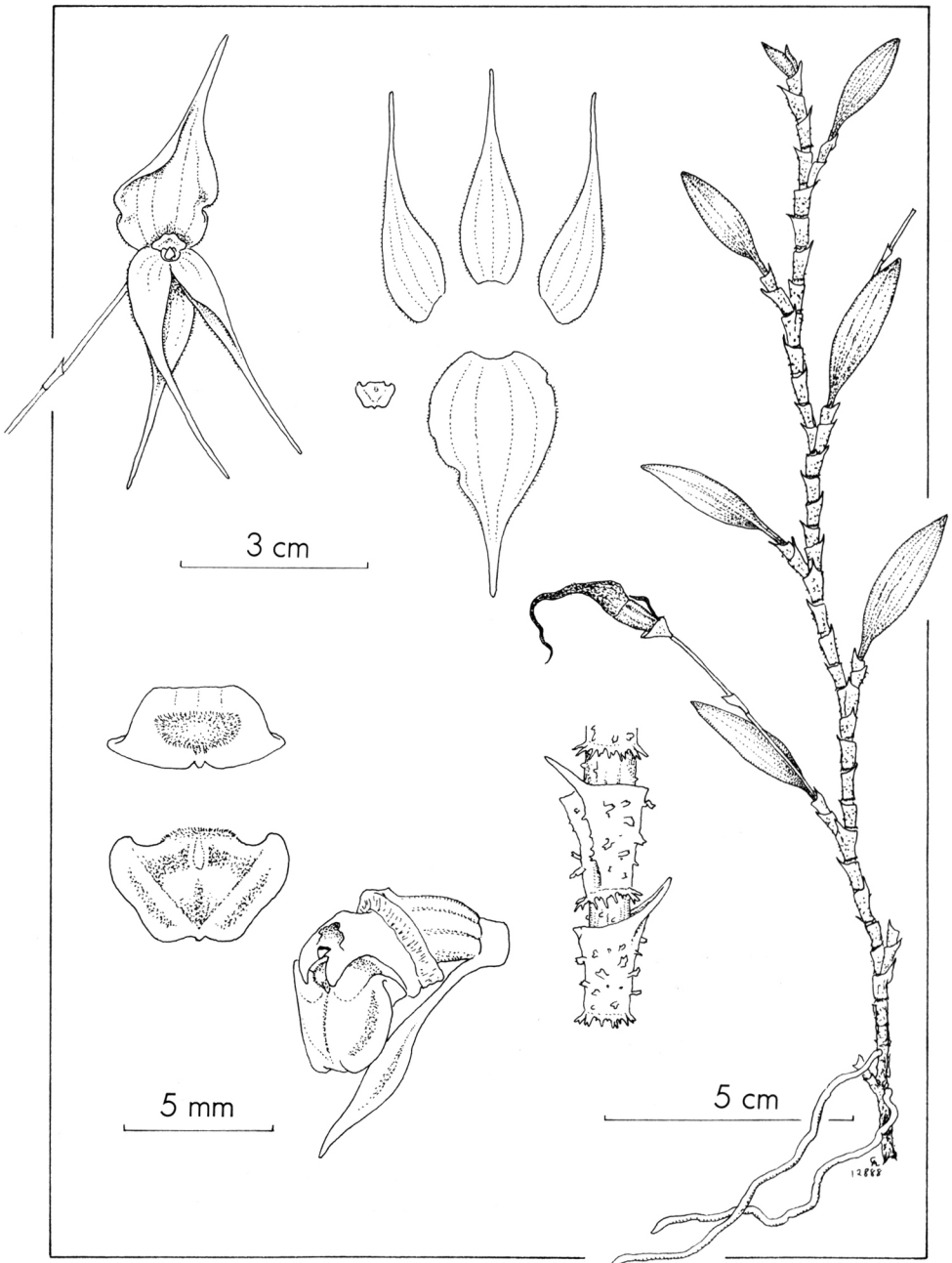


Plate 1. *Brachionidium alpestre* Luer & Vásquez