

Sobralia warscewiczii Rchb.

Described in 1852, but Still a Bit Muddled

By Robert L. Dressler, PhD

DURING HIS PROFESSIONAL lifetime, approximately 1850 to 1889, Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach was generally considered to be “the expert” on orchids, and one suspects that he did little to discourage that image. He rarely or never used a metric ruler (or even an inch ruler), but preferred to say that the stems were as thick as a goose quill (but what species of goose?) or the leaves were similar to those of plant “X” or the flowers were the size of those of plant “Y.” This kind of contrast can be quite useful IF the reader has plant X or Y at hand for comparison. Here we are concerned with *Sobralia warscewiczii* (or *warszewiczii* — Reichenbach was a bit careless about spelling), a plant found in western Panama by Jozeph Warszewicz and published by Reichenbach in 1852. Reichenbach compared *S. warscewiczii* with *Sobralia macrantha*, *Sobralia rosea*, and *Sobralia dichotoma*.

The flower color was said to be “lively” or “bright” purple. We have seen *S. warscewiczii* in western Panama, especially in Finca Dracula in Cerro Punta, and we have an excellent photo taken by Andrés Maduro, Sr. As far as I know, the species has not been found in Costa Rica, but if we knew where to look, I suspect that we could find *S. warscewiczii* somewhere in southeastern Costa Rica.

On August 17, 2003 we had a plant of *S. warscewiczii* in flower at the University of Florida Museum. I didn’t have a camera or a photographer at hand that day. *Sobralia* flowers tend to be ephemeral, and I felt sure that it would not wait 24 hours for me, so I tried to pickle the flower in alcohol, hoping to preserve as many details as possible. Apparently the jar later fell and shattered, destroying the flower. As far as I know, the plant died without producing another flower. It is no longer to be found in the greenhouse. In fact, I’m not even sure that the greenhouse is still there.

In Neubig et al. (2011), a plant of *S. warscewiczii* is listed as Blanco 2576 (FLAS), but the plant in question is from northern Costa Rica, and I doubt that it is *S. warscewiczii*. It might be *Sobralia bradeorum*.

In the *Beiträge zu einer Orchideenkunde Central-Amerika’s* (Orchidaceae of Central



ANDRÉS MADURO SR.

America; 1866) Reichenbach offered a drawing of *S. warscewiczii* (p. 9–10). According to the drawing, the sheaths should bear prominent warts, though our photos of the type specimen do not show such large warts. According to Reichenbach, there is a prominent median keel on the lip, but we have been unable to see such a median keel in Warszewicz’ specimen (the type specimen of the species). However, we do see about five separate veins in the center of the lip, and this is easily seen in the type specimen in Vienna. Thus, we are somewhat skeptical of Reichenbach’s drawing. We do feel sure that the plants collected in Panama near Rio Sereno are *S. warscewiczii*, as they agree with the type specimen more than the drawing that Reichenbach supposedly made from it.

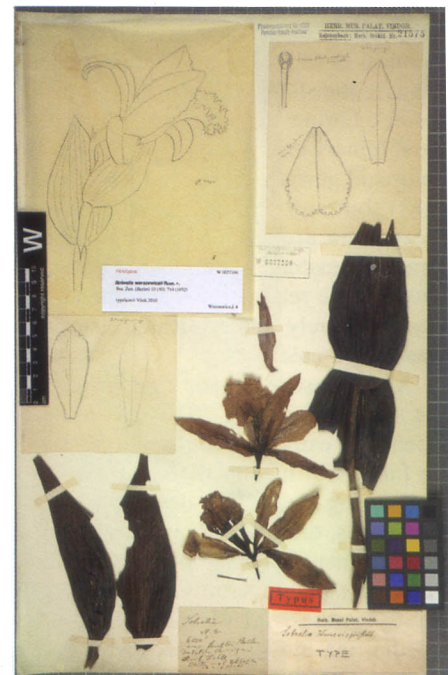
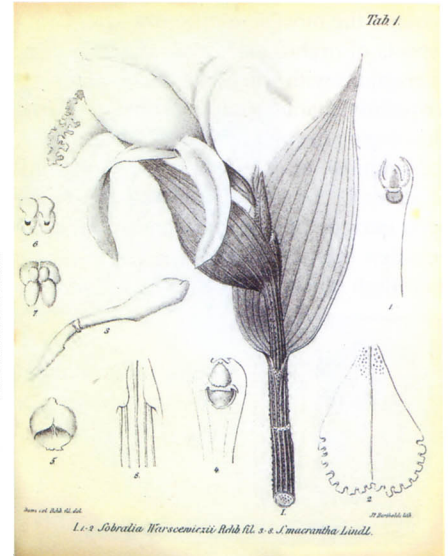
***Sobralia warscewiczii* Rchb.f.**, Bot. Zeit. (Berlin) 10(40): 714. 1852.

TYPE: Panama. “*Sobralia* N. 8 / 6000’ / nur an feuchten Stellen des Vulcan Chiriqui. 6000’. Blüthe viel lebhaft als auf Bild.” *J. Warszewicz s.n.* (holotype, W 0027100 / W-Rchb Orch 21575).

References

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 Reichenbach, H.G. 1852. Neue Orchideen der Expedition des Herrn J. de Warszewicz. *Botanische Zeitung* 10:680–783.
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- [1] *Sobralia warscewiczii*. Note the four or five subparallel raised veins in the center of the lip.
- [2] Reichenbach’s original drawing of *Sobralia warscewiczii* (1866).
- [3] *Sobralia warscewiczii* type specimen from the Reichenbach Herbarium, Vienna, Austria.