Papilionanthe pedunculata

Among the 400 orchid pictures which were generously sent to me by Karel Petrzelka, the Czech consul to Vietnam, I was fascinated by one in particular: the *Papilionanthe pedunculata*. It is a wonderful orchid that I have never seen before. I wondered how there could be such a beautiful creation of a flower with such an eccentric shape and extraordinary color.

Appearing as a phoenix with opened wings, the flower is very attractive. The petals and sepals are as white as pure snow. The column has a tint of pink encircled by dark purple which stands out against the dark yellow anther cap. The lip slightly bends forward. The dark brown spotted labelum ends with numerous white spurs.

Karel Petrzelka mentionned that he found this special orchid in an evergreen forest at an elevation of 1500-1600 meters near Dam Ron, 30km Northwest of Da Lat, Lam Dong province. He also noted that he bought many orchids with flower from Mondul Kiri, Cambodia.

In 1935, Kerr reported this species as an Aerides and in 1974, Garay moved it into the Papilionanthe because the stem, leaves and aerial roots are similar to those of the *Papilionanthe hookeriana* or *Papilionanthe teres*.

Papilionanthe pedunculata
Photo: Karel Peterzelka

Papilionanthe hookeriana
Photo: Bui Xuan Đang

According to Gunnar Seidenfaden, author of "The Orchid of Indochina", *Papilionanthe pedunculata* is an endemic orchid of Vietnam and Cambodia. This book lists approximately 136 genus and 720 species in Vietnam.

Since that day, I have been searching in vain to find any additional photos or information related to this magificent orchid.

Fortunately in April 2010, I found this astonishing species when I returned to Da Lat. This was a precious reward for me, an old man who had endured a 17-hour flight and a month-long journey travelling from the North to the South of his home country looking for orchids.

We especially enjoyed the asmosphere of Nhu Anh villa which is located at 33 Vo Truong Toan Street, District # 8, Da Lat. This small and cozy mini-hotel is owned by Mr. Nguyen Tuan Trinh, an acquaintance from spring 2009. Inside the house, from the hall, living room, dining room, and even the bedrooms were ornamented with attractive orchids species: *Aerides houlettiana, Renanthera imschootiana, Calanthe vestita, Paphiopedillum calosum, Dendrobium hemilanoglossum, Arachnis annamensis, Vanda desoniana,* etc.

Aerides houlettiana

Renanthera imschootiana

Calanthe vestita

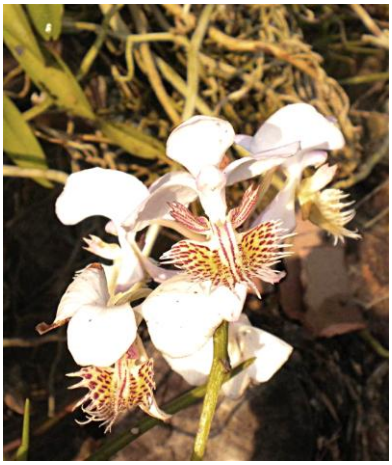
Arachnis annamensis

Vanda desnisoniana

Stepping down to the garden, I found more valuable and rare orchids which were hung around the thatched roof gazebo and on the fence: *Stereochilus dalatensis, Bulbophyllum nigrescens, Eria tomentosa, Schoenorchis gemmata* and some that I could not identify yet.

In the garden corner, I noticed that there was a familiar flower facing the tall weed. Turning upward, I was certainly astonished to find the *Papilionathe pedunculata* which I have been looking for, in almost wilted conditions.

Without hesitation, I took several shots from my camera before the sunlight went down.



The next day at Le Trong Chau nursery, I found a small plant with only 2 flowers and few buds. The color of the flowers was not quite white but a tint of pink.

Two days later, I visited Mr. Le Van Thanh who owned an enormous orchid collection. In front of his house was a rather tall bush of *Papilionanthe pedunculata* growing together with *Renanthera imschootiana*, both reaching heights of 3 meters with numerous inflorescens dangling under the weight of the early rain.

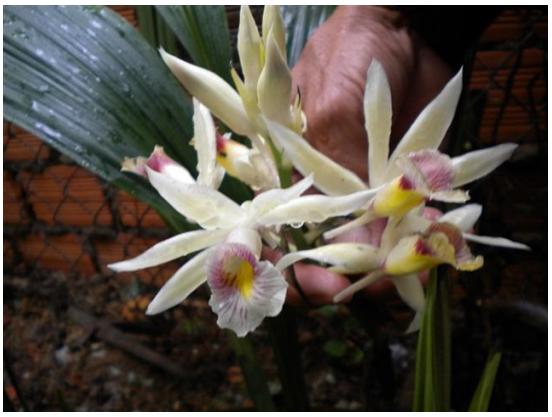
After enjoying a cup of delicious tea, I asked permission to visit the nursery before the rain fell again.

I took quite a few shots to make sure that I could get some nice pictures of Thanh's collection, which is abundant of valuable orchids: *Dendrobium falconeri, Holcoglosom subulifolium, Phalaelaenopsis manii, Phaius longicornu, Renanthera vietnamensis, Trudelia pumila* and many more.

Dendrobium falconeri

Holcoglossum subulifolia

Phalaenopsis manii



Phaius longicornu

Reananthera vietnamensis

Trudelia pumila

The flowers of *Papilionanthe pedunculata* were truly fascinating. Some had just opened, while others opened 2 days prior. They were all fresh, untainted, and positioned differently which are fundamental requirements for a good picture.

I realize that I have been very fortunate. I have endured a long civil war and had the opportunity to immigrate to the United States where I could enjoy the freedom, the prosperity and the most advanced health care which gave me the opportunity to come back to my home country.

I wonder if I will ever have the chance to go back to see these flowers or not. Nonetheless, I hope that the recent journey was not my last visit.

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