

ORCHID DIGEST

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BOOK REVIEW

ORQUÍDEAS IN INKATERRA AT MACHU PICCHU PUEBLO HOTEL

by Benjamin Collantes M., Carmen Soto V., and José Koechlin von Stein, 2007. Inkaterra Asociación, Lima. 351 pp, 246 color photographs, large quarto, hardcover, bilingual (Spanish & English). ISBN 978-603-45043-1-8; Deposito Legal en la Biblioteca Nacional del Peru 2007-11200.

CONTRARY TO CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, all roads do not lead to Rome, they lead to southern Peru. An exaggeration, perhaps, but not a particularly strong one. The fading memory of the Shining Path and the dark years they represent in Peru's modern history has given way to an economic expansion that is palpable. Tourism has skyrocketed and in the 15 years I have been working in Peru I have seen the sleepy town of Aguas Calientes at the base of the Sacred City of Machu Picchu transform itself into a site of hustle and bustle with new construction, mostly hotels and restaurants for the burgeoning tourist trade, in every direction.

But it is not just tourism that has exploded – biological and ecological studies are also flourishing like never before. The Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu is an enormous national park (think Yellowstone National Park in the United States) of which the Sacred City known to tourists is but a very tiny part. It is one of the most accessible protected pristine natural areas in Peru thanks to the infrastructure established for tourism as well as an elaborate trail system dating back to Inca times. I have been involved in Machu Picchu for many years and wrote *Machu Picchu: Orchids* (PROFONANPE, 2003), sponsored by the Finnish Government.

The Sanctuary alone would not render southern Peru the cosmic center for new study. The proverbial other shoe is the Manu Biosphere Reserve a stones throw to the east of Cusco and Machu Picchu. Manu is pretty much considered the single most important patch of life on the planet. This review is not a grant proposal seeking funding and that statement is not hyperbole. Manu is important. Manu is a vast reserve that includes essentially every habitat found along the Andes – from cold cloud forest in the Department of Cusco down to lowland jungle in the Department of Madre de Dios. It has been phenomenally augmented – particularly at higher elevations which are underrepresented in Manu – with a patchwork quilt of private reserves. People in these parts are serious about conservation! One goes from high elevations with alpacas, llamas, and Andean condors down to the hot lowlands replete with macaws, giant otters, tapirs, and toucans, and not inconsequentially with the flamboyant Cock-of-the-Rock halfway down the transect. I work with one group based in Texas, the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (see: orchids at andesamazon.org) in long term study of the region. That and I also get great



personal satisfaction that nearly all the students from the University of Cusco that I have worked with over the past 15 years are either employed by foreign researchers with grants in the area or are overseas getting graduate degrees at various universities around the world.

So after years of inactivity, the generation of new information is coming at a very exciting, rapid pace from multiple sources. It seems like almost every day new orchids are found that are either new to Peru or new to science. The subject of this review is a new volume on the orchids of Machu Picchu based on the orchid garden at the Pueblo Hotel in Aguas Calientes and(or) inspired from the springboard of the hotel's garden. This represents one more leap forward in our cataloguing of the region's biodiversity. There are two Pueblo Hotels within the Sanctuary: one in Aguas Calientes that includes an elaborate orchid garden and one on the mountain at the entrance to the Sacred City. The owners, the Koechlin family, have a very long, res-

olute history as pro-conservation activists.

Every book of this kind has photographs that tantalize the reader according to their interests. Without a doubt I note the photographs of *Vasquezilla boliviana*, new to both Machu Picchu and Peru. I believe these are the first color photographs of this rare monotypic genus previously considered endemic to Bolivia. Pleurothallid enthusiasts especially will find a bevy of interesting species from extremely showy ones like *Masdevallia antonii* (as well as the rarely illustrated endemics *M. karineae* and *M. marizae*) to more subtle ones like *Pleurothallis cf. antennifera* (as *Pleurothallis* sp. 4), *P. cf. aryter* (as *Pleurothallis* sp. 6), and *P. cf. casapensis* (as *Pleurothallis* sp. 7). And then there are numerous wonderful species of *Stelis*, that confound taxonomists so. But interesting orchids are shown in almost every genus illustrated. What makes this extra tantalizing is that few of the endemic species from this region have made their way to horticulture and so will be unknown to most readers.

The senior author, Benjamin Collantes, is a superb photographer well known both inside and outside of Peru. His photographs are reproduced from 1/4 page images to luxurious 2-page spreads and represent the bulk of *Orquideas*. Of the 372 species recorded from the Sanctuary to date, 178 species in 57 genera are shown. In addition to "just" orchids, habitat photographs include what I believe is the finest panoramic 2-page view of the Sacred City, presumably taken from a mountain on the other side of the Río Urubamba or by helicopter from similar vantage.

Typically when I review volumes like this one, I mildly chide the publishers for producing such an expensive volume and ask the question could it have been produced as a smaller format, vastly less expensive effort. In this case I don't think this applies. *Orquideas* is meant as a grand celebration, a spectacular presentation volume and deserves the full royal treatment. Certainly one of the largest groups that will buy and savor this book are tourists that want to remember the special experience of Machu Picchu. While some might consider this one more coffee-table book, the amount of new information belies such a casual dismissal.

It is an exciting time in Cusco and *Orquideas* is a significant step forward, but hardly the last, in our documenting the incredible biodiversity of the region. Everyone involved is to be commended for producing a tome that is both significant and beautiful. They have helped keep research momentum in the area moving forward as well as making a conservation ethic and imperative accessible to a wide audience. ♡

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ORCHID DIGEST Show Trophy Winners Spring 2008

Five Cities Orchid Society
13th Annual Central Coast Show
"Orchid Carnival"
Coastal Valley Orchid Society

London Orchid Society Show
London, Canada
Wendy Hoffman

Orchid Society of Western Pennsylvania
"Orchid Party In The Park"
Carolyn Bolton

Houston Orchid Society Show
"April Showers"
Brazos Valley Orchid Society

Arkansas Orchid Society Show
Little Rock
Arkansas Orchid Society

Rogue Valley Orchid Show
Nadine Gindhart

Sacramento Orchid Society
"Orchid Fiesta"
Cathy & Sam Norris
"Taco Fiesta"

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