

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

# Inkaterra, Peru

Orchid Gardens and Reserves

Text and photographs by Thomas Mirenda



IMAGINE, IF YOU will, a lush and rugged landscape nestled above and alongside a rushing river. Just across the river, the steep vertical face of a grand mountain, its trees bedecked with golden oncidium blooms, juts impressively into the cool, misty clouds. Happy, industrious people have built granite pathways and staircases through this natural garden where hummingbirds quarrel and cavort, competing for fuchsia flowers. Lovely, natural green walls and green roofs interplay with the lively topography as you wander through its winding mysteries. While taking in all this stunning beauty, you suddenly realize that there are orchids encrusting practically every tree and rock surface — elleanthus and sobralias cascading off of rock walls, thriving, vigorous maxillarias, sudamerlycastes and anguloas overwhelming and spilling over the crevices in which they were placed years ago, and outrageous specimens of unusual pleurothallids exuberantly bedecking every tree and shrub.



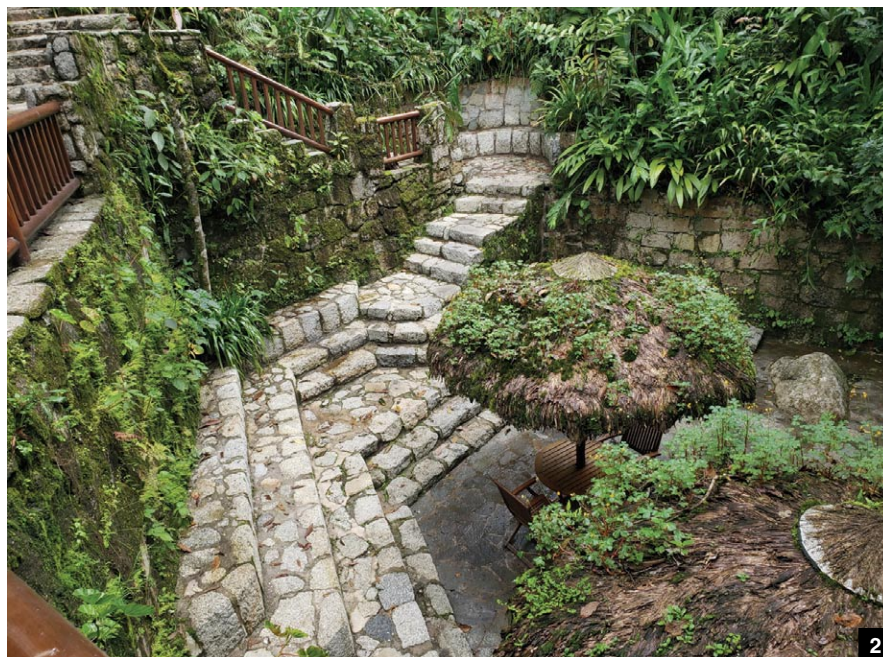
Thomas Miranda

There is no need to fantasize about such a place, as it actually exists. The Orchid Garden at the Inkaterra Pueblo Hotel near Machu Picchu is all these things and more.

Conceived by Peruvian entrepreneur Jose Koechlin and brought to fruition by an enthusiastic and dedicated staff led by Carmen Soto, the Gardens at Inkaterra have been thrilling visitors for several decades, but are not visited nearly enough by the orchid community. I hope to change this. Inkaterra Pueblo is not only a magnificent orchid garden, but it represents something even more wonderful and important.

Orchid gardens and reserves are suddenly appearing around the world. They will become increasingly important as species repositories and refugia for plants endangered by deforestation, land degradation and climate change. Indeed, orchid gardens such as this one are underutilized conservation resources where some of the real, practical aspects of conservation biology can be harnessed and practiced.

As one of the premier and successful orchid gardens currently in existence, Inkaterra holds many treasures, including several newly described species. Specializing almost completely in the endemic flora of the region around Machu Picchu, the garden is a fine example of the circa situm conservation concept. In other words, the plants native to the region have



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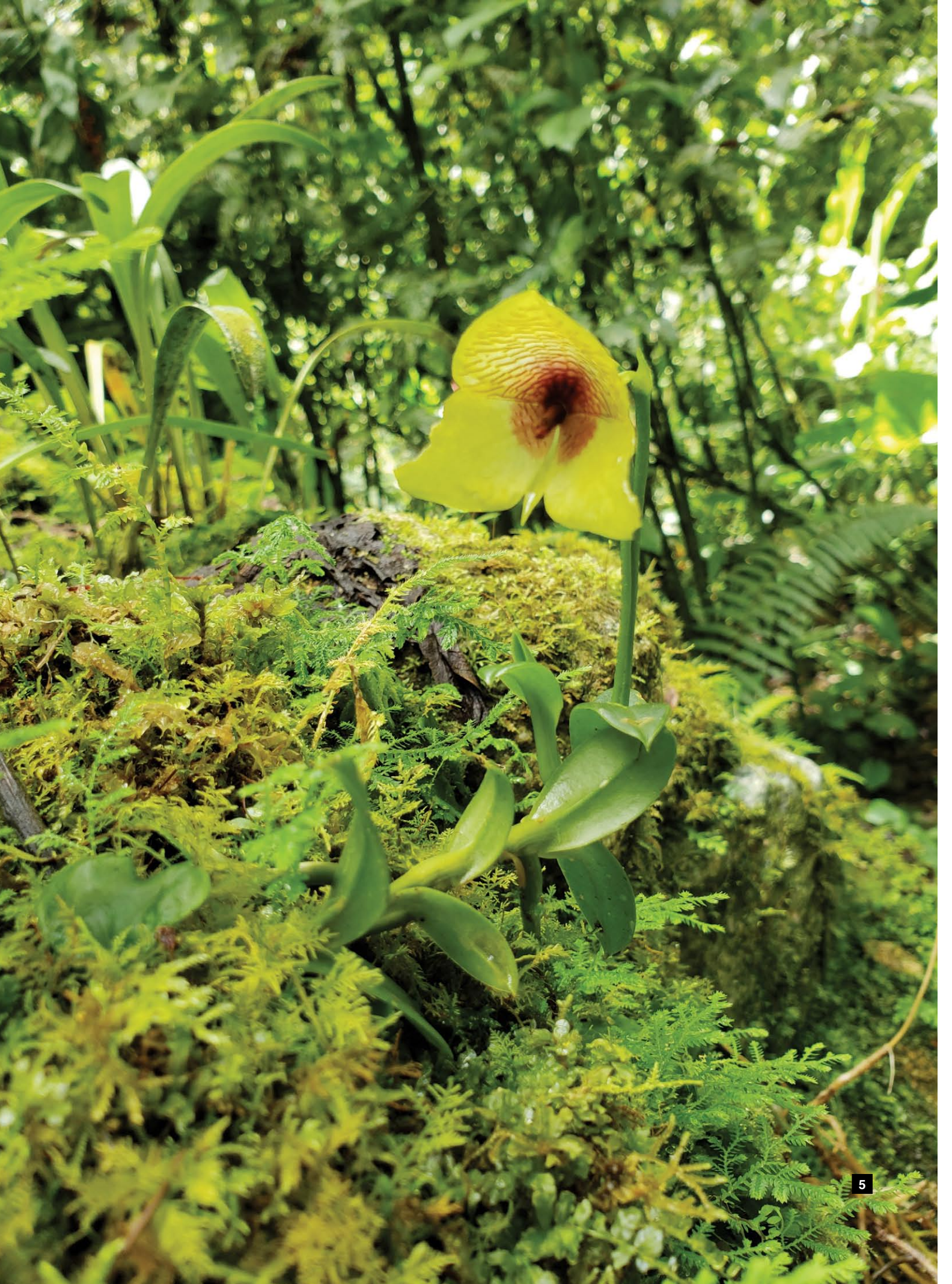


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- [1] A magnificent specimen of *Trichopilia fragrans* growing in the garden. Individual flowers can reach 4 ½ inches (11 cm) in diameter.
- [2] The terraced gardens at Inkaterra are breathtakingly beautiful.
- [3] Imagine happening upon these magnificent *Masdevallia antonii* flowers in the wild.
- [4] This awesome maxillaria is *Maxillaria platypetala*, a cool-growing Peruvian endemic. The characteristically down-facing white flowers reach up to 3 ½ inches (8 cm) in diameter.

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been used to populate the gardens. So the orchids are providing the garden with spectacle, but are also being conserved in what is the closest situation to a natural in situ situation. As lovely as it would be to have a colony of *Phragmipedium kovachii* there, it does not naturally occur in the region, and therefore would be inappropriate for the garden's mission. Even so, Ms. Soto regularly collaborates with taxonomists and ecologists, documenting new discoveries within the region, and the staff there provides walking educational tours and programs to their visitors.

Some of the new discoveries contained within the gardens of Inkaterra will be the subject of future articles. To be continued!

— Tom Miranda has been working professionally with orchids for over three decades. He is an AOS accredited judge and is the chairman of the American Orchid Society's Conservation Committee. He recently coauthored *The Book of Orchids: A life-size guide to 600 species from around the world* (email: [biophiliak@gmail.com](mailto:biophiliak@gmail.com)).



[5] It is no wonder that telipogons are so difficult to grow in our temperate collections. Pictured here is *Telipogon bowmanii*.

[6] The individual flowers of *Elleanthus* species are quite small but their colorful heads of bracts can be nonetheless striking. This specimen is believed to be an introgressed hybrid of *Elleanthus spaerocephalum*.

[7] *Masdevallia veitchiana* flowering in the gardens.

[8] The large, cattleya-like *Sobralia virginalis* flowers last only about a day but plants flower repeatedly throughout the year.