

The Red

Dendrobium speciosum subsp. curvicaule

By
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In the December 1990 Australian Orchid Review, David Banks and Steve Clemesha make a brief reference to a red clone of *D. speciosum subsp. curvicaule* in their informative article "Dendrobium speciosum - A Review of the Species." This is the story of that plant.

Late in September 1990 Kevin Hipkins of Royale Orchids flowered a plant of *Dendrobium speciosum* which he had received at his nursery as a legally collected bush seedling from north Queensland three years previously. Kevin rang me to say that he was sending the plant to me to see if I was interested in working with it in my breeding programme. It arrived in due course, in full flower. It was a plant of *Dendrobium speciosum subsp. curvicaule* from the northern part of the range of that orchid.

But this was no ordinary *Dendrobium speciosum*. It carried four upright spikes of flowers, nicely clear of the foliage of the plant, the flowers were of good shape and texture and of reasonable size, but they were RED! Well over half of each flower was red, not the odd streak or blotch of dull red that we have seen in *Dendrobium speciosum* before, these flowers carried a consistent pattern of deep bright red over much of the flower, including the petals. It is the most striking Australian Native *Dendrobium* Species that I have ever seen.

The plant was admired by a large number of native orchid enthusiasts - all agreeing that it was *D. speciosum subsp. curvicaule*. Of course there was the odd vague comment of 'It must be a hybrid' from a couple of people who had only seen the photographs - but with what? The growth habit of the plant is typical of the subspecies.

I contacted Kevin and advised him that I would most certainly be interested in working with the plant, and asked him what he had in mind with regard to a breeding programme. His reply surprised me to say the least, saying: "You are the native man, you do whatever you think is best." How many people would be prepared to let a valuable plant like this out of their collection and into the care of someone else to work with without instructions or restrictions. I felt very privileged and honoured to have the opportunity to work with this plant under these conditions. The programme so far has been quite satisfying. We have had good germination of a selfing, and sibling crosses with *Dendrobium speciosum subsp. speciosum*, *Dendrobium speciosum subsp. curvicaule* and *Dendrobium speciosum subsp. pedunculatum*. I made no hybrids with it this year - maybe next year when I have had a chance to further consider the possibilities.

Kevin has given the plant the clonal name of 'Margaret Healey'.

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