

# "Red" *Den. speciosum*

by  
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In completing this article I have revised my first one published in August 1991 (written 19th. February 1991) and the second prepared for the A.N.O.S. Far North Coast Orchid Society monthly bulletin dated 17th July 1991. Developments that occurred later last year have also been included.

My introduction to this fascinating and controversial form of coloured *Dendrobium speciosum* came as quite a shock to me two years ago. Being a *Den. speciosum* freak I have been obtaining all varieties over many years and have them growing around our swimming pool, at ground level and in hanging wire baskets. I couldn't believe my eyes one morning early in August 1989, when I saw a clone opening its early flowers that showed intensive spotting which gave a "Red" appearance. I put the plant in a safe spot, away from visitors' hands, and watched the later flowers as they came out, all coloured. A fortnight later another miracle happened, two more clones opened their flowers, also all spotted - so started our activities. At this stage I had not spoken to Steve Clemesha and learnt of the similar spotted clone he was familiar with, collected in the mid New South Wales coast, so therefore my amazement.

I sent photos to Ted Gregory and Steve Clemesha for their comments.

The history of the clones I had is very interesting. John Mewburn, a well known Australian orchidist from Queensland, gave me, as a gift in 1987, a quantity of *Den. speciosum* varieties which included four that were of the spotted form. The fifth I obtained from another Queensland area.

I decided to give them all clonal names starting with 'Red' and they are as follows, (the names date from 1st. February 1991).

1. *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Red Prince'
2. *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Red Tzar'
3. *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Red Star'
4. *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Red Spot'
5. *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Red Denis'.

Their origin and mystery is so interesting. I'm sure that they will create a lot of discussion (they already have, theories and opinions are in from everywhere) as more information comes to light. My own observations are that three of the clones from John Mewburn, I feel sure, came from northern Queensland and another Queensland area so there could be a considerable spread of their locations. One of the spotted clones is reported as coming from the Bega, N.S.W. area, however, this cannot be confirmed and cannot be considered as an origin factor.

The condition of the clones, as I received them, indicated that they came from a fairly hard-growing area, however, after four years of ownership I feel they have responded to cultivation and improved quite well.

Regarding the colour of the flowers of the above clones, I am quite sure that Steve Clemesha's description that "This desirable clone exhibits deep cream flowers with distinctive deep purple spots" (A.O.R. 55/6 December 1990) is correct. The colour called "Red" is a loose description, it is in fact a grouping of deep purple spots. The more spots there are the more the impression of a solid "Reddish" block of colour, but it is a deep purple. This spotting is similar on all my clones' flowers, it does vary however from flower to flower and clone to clone. Some of the tepals have up to half coloured and some labellums up to three-quarters coloured.

Regarding the culture I use; we are on the Richmond River about 35 metres away from the water's

edge, the shade house and pool are bordered by sugar cane on two sides, one is 10 metres and the other is 25 metres away. Using plenty of light, I let them have full or half day direct sun from April through to flower spike and bud form, then get them into a light or dappled shade, with no direct sun during flowering. I fertilise and water well during the flowering period and have to inspect each day or twice a day for the cursed *Dendrobium* beetle; this inspection has to start from August through to March.

The first three of the clones flowered in 1989 and the remaining two in 1990, the last to flower was 'Red Denis' and was given to Mr. D. Lynch, President of A.N.O.S. Far North Coast Orchid Society who is a well respected and qualified authority on *Den. speciosum* and also a judge.

In 1989 Denis, Mike Symmons and I started a hybridizing activity at Mike's nursery, Pacific Orchids. Mike is doing the pollinating and we found the clones were all quite good parents. We get really excellent flasking results, Vic Miscamble and his wife did our flasking at Coolangatta, the success rate was beyond our expectations. The *Den. speciosum* crosses provided good seedlings, unfortunately they were all sold hardly before they hit the bench - sorry we have to wait another year.

In June 1991 the saga of the "Reds" again evidenced itself in my collection, this time a small clone flowered with the multiple massed purple spots on all its flowers.

Luckily, the flowering occurred a fortnight before Steve Clemesha visited and spoke at our monthly society meeting. The history of this clone is quite different from the others reported earlier in this article. This time the plant, as it turned out, was actually one given to me by Steve in August 1986 and tagged showing that date and specifying it was a *Den. speciosum* var. *pedunculatum*. The identifying, original tag still in the pot is in Steve's own handwriting, he recognised this fact, as I had a day or so before he came up, but unfortunately he had no idea of its origin or that it was a "Red" clone he had given me five years ago. It was a remarkable coincidence. He did agree on the night of our meeting to the clone being named 'Red Clemesha' in line with the others, also he confirmed it was the variety *pedunculatum*. It certainly has been a very good example of the value of recording pertinent facts on tags.

This clone is a group of eight pseudobulbs, 4.5cm tall and with one, two and three tough leaves to the bulb. There was only one raceme on each of the two bulbs that flowered. The new bulb that grew is only 5cm tall, this together with the small flowers indicates it is a dwarf variety *pedunculatum*. The cream colour and deep massed purple spots are similar to the variety *curvicaule* ones but of course much smaller.

Steve, at our meeting, again referred to the coloured spotting, he is still at a loss to understand the reason for it, the unpredictability and the vast distances between locations.

The last event in this procession occurred in the spring of last year. I went out to water my collection and to look for beetles, when I noticed another clone opening its first flower. I had another clone that started to show spots!!! After several days all of the flowers were out and similarly spotted. My first reaction was why me, why am I getting all these clones?

This plant is probably the best I have, the flowers are larger, just as clearly marked and the clone is more robust. It is a Queensland plant that we have recorded as *Den. speciosum* var. *curvicaule* 'Pacific Red Spots'. I have given it to Mike Symmons, in fact, I have given all the other spotted clones to Mike and Denis between them as I believe at my age (71 years) they have many more years than I to develop and study this segment of our most fascinating of Australian orchids. Our good friend Wal Upton has his own experience with "Red" forms and kindly gave Mike pollen from his "Red" clone, variety *pedunculatum*. This was used on Pacific Red Spots' and to date is doing well in the flask.

I have another complicating matter that is very interesting and worth reporting. At the Annual Spring Show of the A.N.O.S. Far North Coast Orchid Society that was held last spring (August 1991), one of our longtime native growers tabled a *Den. Lemon Glow* (*Den. Jamie Upton* x *Den. speciosum*) that had its flowers identically "Red" spotted to ours. The massed, dark purple spots were quite similar, the

flower shapes of course were different. The owner, Neville Kirkland has had the plant for some time, he grows it in Alstonville here in the north coast some 20 odd kilometres away from us. There obviously is some relationship here and we would be pleased to hear from any other growers having hybrids so marked.

Mike and Denis have again made a number of sibling crosses using the "Red" clones' pollens also as mentioned earlier Wal Upton's spotted variety pedunculatum. These together with a number of other Dendrobium hybrids with the Reds' are developing quite well in flasks.

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