

ARTICLE No: 5

From Letters to the Editor, Orchids Australia

Dear Sir,

Red spotted *Den. speciosum*

After reading the letter by Mike Symmons in your February issue which refers to my article of December 1994, I feel compelled to respond to several of the matters raised in his letter.

If you refer to my article you will see that from the first paragraph I stressed that what I wrote was only my thoughts on this matter. I deliberately did not mention any names even though I could have said a great deal more on this subject. In Spring 1991 during a visit to Ballina I personally inspected several of the plants referred to by Mike at his nursery, Pacific Orchids, in flower. I have also, some years ago, personally viewed *Den. speciosum* 'Margaret Healey' in flower at Yondi Orchids. The comments made by me in my article were, based on many observations over several years and I stand by my published comments 100%.

I also have personally flowered and seen quite a few of the Phil Spence cross referred to. Amongst those flowered by me and others, I have seen two with red spotting and both these plants comply with my published description and I would NOT have them in my yard. The others of this cross that have flowered the normal colour were beautiful and well worth owning. These "normal colour clones" do not comply with my published description and I believe them to be free of this phenomenon. This observation is completely consistent with part 'f' of my article, and I quote:

"If you have purchased seedlings from plants exhibiting these symptoms they may not be infected if the breeder used dry seed and not a green pod. There is strong evidence that most of the seedlings a normal dry seed pod will not carry a virus, even if the parents were infected. However, this is not a 100% guarantee, -so these should also be isolated. If ultimately the seedling flowers normal colour then it is probably clean. If it flowers with red spots then I would be very careful with it until final results are published."

In relation to the story by John Donnelly of Bega, he personally told me the same story several years ago and promised to show me some of these plants, but alas they never materialised here. It is always possible that such plants will be found in the wild as clearly red genes do exist in *Den. speciosum* as a look at the labellum shows. However, all my inquiries over many years have failed to uncover a single confirmed red spotted plant being found IN THE WILD, and the plants currently under discussion, which are not from the Bega area, I believe are NOT the result of a random genetic mistake but infected with a pathogen of some type.

The next matter I wish to address is the test results quoted. It is my experience that most testing labs will tell you that a positive result for virus is guaranteed, but a negative result is NOT guaranteed! It simply means that in the sample tested a virus was not detected, but that does not mean that one is not present.

Finally I wish to say to those interested in this matter, I wrote my article with honourable intentions in the firm belief that if my suspicions are ultimately proven correct, (which I believe WILL be the case), and I had not come forward and warned my fellow growers when I did, that would have been negligent. I, like many others, was initially excited when the first reports of these red spotted speciosums filtered through the grape vine and I did make an inquiry to Ross Wirth back then. I have since, however, changed my view of them, as have many other reputable growers, which is no secret.

Best wishes and good growing.

Neil & Meg Finch, Kilaben Bay, NSW.

The Editor,
Dear Sir,

With the amount of correspondence appearing in various orchid publications as to whether red spotted *Dendrobium speciosum* is virused or not, I feel I must write this letter to clarify the whole subject from a scientific viewpoint.

It is true I have tested by electron microscope some samples of red spotted *Den. speciosum* without detecting

virus. This itself is not very conclusive. A much broader sampling would have to be undertaken to be entirely satisfied whether virus is widespread or not throughout this particular species. That sort of project would involve a lot of time and at the moment cannot be fitted into my programme. I hope, as the year progresses, to be able to commence a project that will clarify this whole question.

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