

Central Coast Group Newsletter

Jun 2016

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Guest speaker for June: John Bennett & Arnold Lokrey: growing orchids in sphagnum moss.

This month's article: **The Mystery of Sphagnum Moss** by Sue Bottom, published with permission

**NEXT MEETING
NARARA COMMUNITY
CENTRE**

**Wednesday
8th June 2016
8.00p.m.**

Committee Meeting – 7.00 p.m.

The cultural plant for Jun 2016, is a plant starting with “M, N & O”

ANOS Central Coast Group takes no responsibility for any loss or damage that may be caused by the use of any products or information that may be mentioned in this Newsletter.



ANOS CENTRAL COAST GROUP

**MEETINGS are held on the second Wednesday of each month in the Narara Community Centre,
2 Pandala Road, Narara.**

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS MOST WELCOME

All correspondence to The Secretary
ANOS Central Coast Group
PO Box 3010 ERINA, NSW, 2250

PATRON: DAVID BUTLER

President John Andrews
E-mail: tinya@bigpond.net.au

Mobile: 0407 689 630

Secretary: Mike Fish
Email: mifish@optusnet.com.au

Mobile: 0417 689 360

Treasurer: Jakob Wanner: ph:329 7653

Editor: Carolyn Elwin ph: 0412 222121
Email: carolynelwin@hotmail.com

Dates for your Diary

- 25th & 26th June:** Mingara Orchid Show
- Early Aug 16:** PNG Orchid Tour. Contact Phil Spence for more details: 0408994696/
philspenceorchidpro@msn.com
- 7th Aug 16:** Home visit with Grahame Young
- 19th 20th & 21st Aug 16:** CCG ANOS Spring Show
- 1st-4th Sep 16:** 8th ANOS Conference and Show to be held in association with the Kempsey Speciosum Spectacular
- 2nd-3rd Sep 16:** CCG ANOS bus trip to ANOS Kempsey Conference and Show
- 8th & 9th Oct 16:** CCG ANOS Sarc Show
- 10th -11th Sep 16:** Wyong Show

Accounts for Payment:

- Nil

Correspondence: Outwards

- Nil

Inwards:

- Letters and certificates from the Ira Butler Trophy Committee
- Letter and attachments from Road Runner Leisure Tours
- Newsletters
- NAB statement

Motion moved that all correspondence be received and dealt with: Neville Lee / seconded by Ralph Lees

General Business

- A reminder that the Mingara Orchid show is being held at the end of June
- George Oehm and Neville Lee have been invited to give a presentation to the Henry Kendal Garden Group
- Need for future guest speakers

General Business from the floor

- John Andrews presented the Ira Butler trophy and certificates to Grahame Young. Well done Grahame
- George Oehm briefly discussed points raised from Anne's Corner



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Phone: **4340 4030**

Fax: 4340 4031

email: info@adairsbus.com.au

Ian & Dor Adair

PO Box 7250

Kariong NSW 2250

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GOSFORD - NORTH WYONG - NEWCASTLE AREA

Narara Valley Nursery & Tank Sales

(02) 4328 2653

Established for 30 years. Suppliers of discount plants & water tanks & accessories on the Central Coast. Services & sales include garden consultations & advisory service, garden accessories, indoor & outdoor plants, water features, discount pots, bonsai plants, garden chemicals, fertilizers & mulch.
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Editorial

When I first became a member of Central Coast ANOS I was a raw beginner and was totally bemused by such terms as sarc, dens and does to say nothing of paphs. I referred to my own meagre collection as little-orchids-with-very-nice-flowers-if-I'm-lucky!! Perhaps we should be more sensitive to new members' learning needs and I propose that we make up a guide for pronunciation of orchid names. What do you think?

Meeting Minutes

Minutes of ANOS Central Coast Group meeting held at Narara Community Centre on Wednesday 11th May 2016. John Andrews opened the meeting

Attendance: As per attendance register.

Apologies: Carolyn Elwin; Anita Williams

Minutes of Previous Meeting: The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13th April 2016 were adopted Grahame Young, seconded Ralph Lees
CARRIED

Business Arising From Minutes: nil

Treasurer's Report: Jakob Wanner reviewed expenses and deposits in relation to the current balance. Motion moved that the report be adopted Jakob Wanner, seconded Mike Fish - CARRIED

Anne's Corner:**Points to consider for the month of May**

- ❖ The long Indian summer has ended and winter's chill and winds have made their presence felt. The Winter Solstice will see sunrise at 6:59 am and sunset at 4:55 – average rainfall for this month will be about 130mm and average temperature range between 7 – 18°.
- ❖ Flower spikes should be appearing on Speciosums, Dendrobium Species and Hybrids (includes Dockrillias) and some Sarcochilus, and Terrestrials should be actively growing
- ❖ Not a great deal to do apart from careful watering and fertilising (there are some Aussie Natives that should be given a rest over the winter period from watering and fertilising, these were mentioned in previous months).
- ❖ For orchids that are to be shown, a little ongoing attention will provide dividends particularly in terms of presentation.
- ❖ Winter is also a good time to give the orchid house a spring clean.

A brief chat will be held before supper so please ask any questions relating to caring for orchids during the winter period or preparation for showing

George Oehm

Member Profile:

I'm sorry, there's no member profile this month

Our Guest Speaker this month was **Jody Cutajar**

Jody had recently travelled around South America and visited various shows. His talk along with his great photography was most informative.

Thanks Jody for a great presentation

Monthly Benching: Point Score

| Exhibitor | C/Fwd | Points | Benc hed | Total |
|------------------|-------|--------|----------|-------|
| Bennett John | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Butler David | 54 | 4 | 4 | 54 |
| Clarke Tony | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cutajar Jody | 15 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| Dunstan Steve | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Elwin Carolyn ** | 8 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Fish Mike | 47 | 2 | 2 | 51 |
| Fitzsimmons Col | 16 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| Lee Neville | 0 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Lees Ralph | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| McIntosh L** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nelson Ian | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Oehm George | 9 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Smith Bruce | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Stephenson, Jim | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Thornton Keith | 40 | 4 | 6 | 50 |
| Tomich Dan | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Villien J & Y | 33 | 0 | 0 | 33 |
| Wanner Jakob | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| White P & F** | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Whittet Robyn** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Williams Anita | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Young Grahame | 208 | 20 | 34 | 262 |

** Novice

Plants benched: 31 by 6 members

Popular Vote: Dendrobium Touch of Gold
(Grahame Young)

Judges Choice: Dendrobium Touch of Gold
(Grahame Young)

GARDEN CITY PLASTICS (NSW)**ALLIED TRADER**

Please visit the new Garden City Plastics website! We've made major improvements to the design and layout. Visit our on-line catalogue - navigation is easy. Browse through to find punnets, pots, windclips, fertilisers, plant protection, coir & peat substrates and a large range of accessories for your next order. We also offer in-house pot and container printing in up to six colours. GCP NSW has moved. Find us at our new location.

Postal Address

4 – 6 Pinnacle Place
SOMERSBY NSW 2250

I have published the first part of Sue Bottom's article in readiness for our presentation this month by John Bennett & Arnold Lokrey. I am hoping it might generate some discussion at our meeting

The Mystery of Sphagnum Moss

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

Orchid growers have a love hate relationship with sphagnum moss. Those that hate it say it caused their plants to rot, and those that love it have probably learned how to properly water plants growing in it. They've learned that you don't water because it's Saturday morning, your normal watering day. You water plants growing in sphagnum when the moss approaches dryness. Grower, know thyself. If you have a heavy hand with watering, sphagnum moss may be problematic for you as you will have to struggle not to water your plants until the moss is nearly dry. If your busy schedule keeps you from watering very often, you may have the opposite problem where the moss can become so dry it becomes crusty and is hard to rehydrate.

Knowing how sphagnum moss grows in nature gives the orchid grower valuable insights. A living layer of moss grows in carpet-like communities in very wet areas floating on a thick layer of partly rotted plant material. The carpet consists of vertically oriented leafy stems that grow upward while the lower stems become buried, die and ultimately decompose to form beds of peat moss. Sphagnum moss tends to acidify its surroundings having a pH as low as 3, which not many bacteria or fungi can tolerate so decomposition occurs slowly. The sphagnum stems are filled with air spaces and have an impressive water holding potential. The moss grows in a low nutrient environment to which it has adapted by having a high cation exchange capacity largely as a result of its high uronic acid content.

There are many qualities of sphagnum moss that make it a good growing medium for epiphytic orchids. The air filled porosity of sphagnum moss (a measure of the void spaces in the potting mix) ranges from 15 to 26% under general conditions, comparable to bark and greater than peat moss. Its high air filled porosity is great for our epiphytic orchids because it allows air to circulate around the roots. Sphagnum can hold up to 20 times its weight in water, so moisture is retained around the roots for subsequent uptake by the plant. Sphagnum moss holds enough moisture and stores positively charged nutrients like calcium, magnesium and potassium for later use rather than them being flushed through the pot. Of course this also means you have the potential to accumulate high concentrations of soluble salts. The acidic nature of sphagnum results in a root zone environment that is hostile to bacteria and fungi, which helps protect the roots from certain diseases and in fact can help nurse ailing orchids back to health.

Grades of Sphagnum Moss. There are approximately 150 species of Sphagnum moss found world-wide and these various species can differ greatly in size, color and chemical properties. Sphagnum cristatum is generally considered the highest quality moss available and grows natively in New Zealand. It is known for its robust leaf structure and longer stem lengths that are great for wrapping around roots. Some report good success with 5 star Chilean moss which is predominantly Sphagnum magellanicum. Chilean moss has shorter strands but is very leafy which can reduce the air available to the plant when compacted into a pot. Less expensive mosses may be found originating from Japan (typically Sphagnum palustre) and China (typically Sphagnum palustre or Sphagnum cuspidatum). Wisconsin and Canadian mosses are typically inexpensive and are a blend of several species native to their respective regions. These less expensive mosses tend to be more fragile, breaking down quickly and increasing the need for more frequent re-potting. This grade of sphagnum is okay if you plan to repot every 6 months, because that's about how long it will last in the pot before turning into a sodden mess that will suffocate the roots of your plant.

Sources of Moss. There are many choices of sphagnum moss available to growers. If possible, only buy the high quality, long fibered sphagnum moss. This high quality moss will last for 2 to 5 years in the pot depending on the quality of your irrigation water as well as how much you water and fertilize. Some report good success with 5 star Chilean moss although others believe the New Zealand moss is fluffier. If you can't find the high quality, long fibered sphagnum moss in your local stores, search online.

Grades of Moss. There is much confusion about the grades of sphagnum moss offered in commerce. Some producers use a star rating for their moss while others use letters or a combination of letters and numbers. It is difficult, if not impossible, to compare grading claims from one producer to another because they are likely different species. Besgrow, who also produces Orchiata, is moving away from alpha or numerical grading systems. Besgrow offers New Zealand Sphagnum cristatum in different grades which are distinguished primarily by strand length. The longer the strand the better the moss is suited for wrapping and achieving a high quality display (Besgrow, personal communication). You don't need to spend the extra money buying the highest quality moss unless you're planning to join the Fūkiran Society, but strand length is important particularly if you wrap the sphagnum around the roots rather than just mashing it into the pot. It would be best to use the moss labeled Supreme by Besgrow with its long strands ideal for wrapping roots, although this grade may be difficult to find in the USA. Don't use a quality lesser than the Premier grade for potting orchids in pure moss and not less than the Classic grade for putting together blends incorporating sphagnum.

General Guidelines. Despite its many great qualities, many hobby growers avoid sphagnum because they have had orchids rot when potted in sphagnum. In year-round warm climates, many plants resent being grown in sphagnum moss, especially if the atmospheric humidity is very high. As a serial overwaterer, I have had my difficulties with orchids growing in sphagnum so here are some general rules for its use.

Wrap the Root Ball. Wrap the sphagnum moss around the root ball, don't just cram the sphagnum moss into the pot. For small plants out of flasks, compots or plug trays, wrap the sphagnum moss around the roots and insert the wrapped plant into a small pot. You don't have to be as meticulous about wrapping the moss strand by strand as when Vanda (syn. Neofinetia) falcatas are potted Japanese style, but take the time to wrap the moss. The longer the strands of moss are, the easier it is to wrap the roots particularly with larger plants.

Pack Moss Firmly. Sphagnum moss is much easier to work with when it's wet, so moisten it prior to use. Some people like to pack the moss into the pot very loosely believing this allows the moss to dry more rapidly. It may seem somewhat counterintuitive, but loose sphagnum moss actually holds more moisture than more tightly packed moss. Think of the moss as a sponge, when you squeeze a sponge it retains less water. On the flip side, if you pack the sphagnum very tightly into the pot, you can potentially compact it so much that you reduce its air holding capacity. I tend to take the middle ground and pack the sphagnum firmly but not densely around the plant, tightly enough that the plant holds itself upright in the pot.

Smaller and Taller Pots Seem to Work Better. Smaller pots seem to work better when using sphagnum. This may simply be a case of a smaller pot having a greater surface area to volume ratio so the moss tends to dry out more quickly. With pots larger than 4 inches, consider blending the sphagnum with porous material like styrofoam or leaving an air space below the sphagnum via the collaring technique. Pot shape is important too. Even though it seems backwards, taller pots of a given size dry faster than shallow pots. With open baskets and rafts, the moss can be packed a little more loosely because it is open to the atmosphere on all sides.

Salt Retention. Sphagnum moss will retain the salts present in your water supply as well as those introduced by your fertilizer. If you use a pure water like rainwater, this may be less of a problem, but many growers may have to compensate for the tendency to accumulate salts by flushing their pots regularly and using dilute fertilizer solutions or fertilizing half as often.

The second part of this article will be published in next month's newsletter

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