



SUSSEX GROUP

Autumn 2024 No 108

REPORTS OF SUSSEX VISITS & EVENTS 2024

It was a real privilege to attend a two-hour orchid propagation workshop in February at The Mathers Foundation in Pulborough, West Sussex, *Stephen Johnson writes*. The event was run by David and Gill Mathers and Jim Durrant, their expert horticulturist. I have never seen so many orchids.



Several enormous state-of-the-art glasshouses are home to thousands of orchids. David and Gill described how orchids develop in nature and how they can be cultivated from seed in the laboratory. They explained how the Victorians struggled to grow orchid seeds and then by chance made the observation that putting seeds underneath the parent plant increased the possibility, albeit slight, of germination.

It wasn't until relatively recently that mycorrhiza were discovered to be the crucial element. Because orchid seeds have no endosperm to nourish them, they need the help of the fungal hyphae to penetrate their porous seedcoat and assist in the first stages of growth.

David, an RHS orchid judge, challenged us to assess five beautiful orchids. None of us were able to correctly place the best orchid out of a group of similarly aged plants so he explained the points to look for. We also studied

a selection of flowers and tried to work out which insects could pollinate them most successfully.

Finally, after a tour of the glasshouses, Jim demonstrated to us how to repot and reshape orchids, and, donning our aprons and gloves we followed his instructions attacking three plants in desperate need of human assistance. We were allowed to take home one of the beautiful *Cymbidium* we had repotted and had the option of buying more.

It was a lovely day out and I learnt a great deal. I have much more respect for my four *Phalaenopsis*, which have been joined by a *Cymbidium*.



Sussex Prairie Garden plant fair: Irma (left), David, Maddy and Jon

This year we attended four plant fairs that are part of the Plant Fair Roadshows (plantfairsroadshow.co.uk), specialist nurseries who organise and promote fairs at beautiful gardens in the south east. Our excellent volunteers sold plants at Arundel Castle Gardens in April (it was freezing), Borde Hill in May, Leonardslee Gardens in June and in September Sussex Prairies (pictured above), which we've been going to for 10 years.

Our fairs have brought in new members and funds for the charity and for speakers. We always need unusual plants and seeds for the sales - if you can help to propagate them, contact Maddy madelaineward@aol.com or speak to her or any other on the committee at our events or fairs.