

Oncidiums at the Mathers Foundation

Part 3: The non-classical cool growing *Oncidium* species

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Photography by H. Peters (unless otherwise stated)

In the previous article, I discussed the use of *Oncidium cirrhosum*, *Onc. naevium* and *Oncidium strictum* (Part 2).

With this article, I will discuss the further influence of the latter species, as well as the influence of *Onc. harryanum*'s primary hybrid *Onc. Rolfeae* and two other unusual species namely *Onc. aurarium* (syn. *Odm. trilobum*) and *Onc. astranthum*, that have produced some outstanding and unusual hybrids, all due to the far-seeing hybridizers Robert Hamilton from California and the late Andy Easton.



Oncidium strictum.



Oncidium nobile.

Oncidium strictum (Cogn.) M.W. Chase & N. H. Williams

The history and description were discussed in the previous article



Oncidium Prince Vultan.



Oncidium Prince Ahmad.



Oncidium (Prince Vultan x Tweedledee).

(Part 2). This is a continuation of the influence of the primary hybrid *Onc. Prince Vultan* registered in 2009 by Robert Hamilton. It is a cross between *Onc. strictum* and *Onc. nobile*, resulting in starry shaped, pale pink flowers with violet mottling on the sepals and petals, a white labellum with a few short reddish-brown marks at the base of the lip, and some cultivars may have a few small violet blotches on the labellum. It has only recently been used as a parent with its first progeny registered in 2020. It imparts its floriferousness and long-lasting qualities but also imparts very interesting patterns in its progeny. *Onc. Prince Vultan* has also been crossed to *Miltonia moreliana*, as well as *Rhynchostele* species and hybrids with interesting results.

Hybrids include

Onc. Prince Ahmad (Prince Vultan x Charlesworthii (1908)).

Onc. Prince Shelley (Prince Vultan x Shelley) 2020

Onc. (Prince Vultan x Bragelonne)

Onc. (Prince Vultan x Tweedledee [Quistrum x *nobile*]).

Oncidium Rolfeae (*nobile* x *harryanum*). Reg. 1886

Oncidium (syn. *Odontoglossum*) *harryanum*'s history since the species discovery in 1886 is just as involved and convoluted. To today, this species has been used in over 8000 hybrids. It imparts to its hybrids ease of culture, vigour, an increased tolerance to higher temperatures and higher light intensity, richer dark colours, broader labellum and long-lasting flowers. In 1898 Vuylsteke registered the hybrid *Onc. Rolfeae*, a cross between *Onc. nobile* and *Onc. harryanum*.

To 2022, *Onc. Rolfeae* was only used in 67 first generation hybrids but featured in over 6600 progeny over the past 128 years. This stunning hybrid is still being used as a parent. The tall 800mm inflorescence carries flowers that are



Oncidium Rolfeae.



Oncidium Janus.

large, pale yellow with bold markings, the lip is large and flat, flowers lasting up to seven weeks, all these qualities are imparted to the progeny, while allowing the colour of the other parent to come through in very unusual patterns.

Hybrids include

Onc. Formosum (Rolfeae x *nobile*) reg. 1904

Onc. Janus (Rolfeae x *crisatellum*) reg. 1910

Onc. Leysa Rolf (Susan Leysa x Rolfeae) reg. 2020

Onc. (Rolfeae x Wild in Bed)

Onc. (Rolfeae x Burning Bed)

The two other unusual species are *Onc. aurarium* (syn. *Odm. trilobum*) and *Onc. astranthum*, both of these to species have an interesting effect on their hybrids.

Oncidium astranthum (syn. *Odm. astranthum*). (Linden & Rchb.f.) M.W. Chase & N.H. Williams

This species hails from Ecuador and Peru, growing in the upper cloud forests (2000-2500 m). A moderate sized plant up to 250 mm tall, carrying a 180 mm long inflorescence. Each inflorescence carrying 6-12 star-shaped flowers about 40 mm across. The flowers are greenish yellow with pale brown stripes



Oncidium Leysa Rolf.



Oncidium (Rolfeae x Burning Bed).



Photographer: D. Mathers

Oncidium astranthum.



Oncidium Saint Trance.



Photographer: R. Hamilton

Oncidium Pesky Trance.

on the petals, or with a solid marking on the sepals. The white lip with pale brown markings is narrow at the base spreading wedgelike to the widest point at the middle, tapering to a sharp point at the tip.

When crossed to the typical larger type of cool-growing oncidium (*odontoglossum*) hybrids it is these markings on the sepals and petals that are transferred to the hybrids in various colours. On the negative side it is inclined to mute the base colour of the other parent. Most of the hybrids were registered by Robert Hamilton, Andy Easton and C. Halls (Mount Beenak Orchids).



Oncidium Entranced.

Hybrids include

Onc. Pesky Trance (*astranthum* x *nobile*) reg. 2008

Onc. Saint Trance (Saint Clement x Pesky Trance) reg. 2020

Onc. Entranced (Pesky Trance x Joe's Drum) reg. 2022

Onc. Catatonic Trance (Pesky Trance x Catatante) reg 2020.

Oncidium aurarium (syn. *Odm. trilobum*) Rchb.f.

The species comes from Boliva, Ecuador and Peru where they grow in wet montane forests at 1450 m. The plant is a large sympodial epiphyte up to 500 mm tall. The inflorescence can grow to 2 metres long. The flowers are carried in a panicle made up of short, widely spaced, zigzag branches. The flowers are 50 mm

across, with widely spaced petals and sepals, their margins slightly undulate. The colouration of the flowers is very variable, not only in the colour intensity but also the amount of blotching. Sepals and petals pale yellowish green with the lower half to two-thirds blotched to almost solidly coloured dark brown. The 3-lobed lip is usually white or pale cream with markings just below the column. (OrchidWiz 2022).

This species has the same effect on its progeny as *Onc. astranthum*, turning the colour and markings of the classical hybrid into very different patterns.

Hybridizing with *Onc. aurarium* started in 1980 in the England, followed by Milton Carpenter of Everglade Orchids, who always had an eye for the unusual. The majority of the early hybrids were made with other *Oncidium* intergenerics



Photographer: L. Gobler

Oncidium aurarium.



Photographer: R. Hamilton

Oncidium Tribbles in a 10 cm pot.



Oncidium John Miller.



Oncidium Swizzle.



Oncidium Tippling.

but nothing special appeared until Robert Hamilton made a hybrid of *Onc. aurarium* crossed to *Onc. nobile*, registering the hybrid as *Onc. Tribbles*. *Oncidium nobile* improved the shape but also muted the colour to a white with various brown scattered markings on the sepals and petals, on a very large floriferous plant.

Oncidium Tribbles has produced a number of very interesting hybrids many with very unusual patterning.

Hybrids include

Onc. Tipples (Ray's Red x Tribbles) reg. 2006

Onc. Swizzle (Tipples x Burning Bed) reg. 2021

Onc. Tippling (Florence Stirling x Tribbles) reg. 2020



Oncidium (Tribbles x [Shine Gate x Wearside Pattern]).

Onc. John Miller (Tribbles x Burning Bed) re. 2010

Onc. (Tribbles x [Shine Gate x Wearside Pattern]).

The one factor binding all these hybrids together, is using *Oncidium nobile* as a partner, mainly to improve the shape and growth habit, but leaving the interesting patterning to be imparted by the odd species mentioned in this article, proving the idiom 'Never judge a book by its cover'.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

See *Orchids South Africa* Vol 54 (1) 2024 p. 65.