

Saving the wild orchids of Borneo

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Borneo (Kalimantan) is the third largest island in the world. It is rich with a variety of indigenous orchid species that grow in the forests. Borneo's rain forests are also home to some extremely rare species of orchids, all highly valued for their exotic aromas and aesthetic beauty. It has been estimated that 2500 to 3000 orchid species grow in the forests of Borneo.

Borneo's orchids are also endangered, a result of the loss of natural habitat from fire, forest damage, and illegal logging. Increased exploitation of the forests of West Borneo, including gold mining and illegal burning, has led to the certain extinction of hundreds of orchid species. According to a Global Forest Watch 2002 report, Indonesia is experiencing one of the most dramatic losses of forestland in the world. Reports showed that at the current rate of loss, Borneo's forests could vanish completely by 2010.

Economic factors, including illegal collecting and selling of wild orchids by domestic or foreign "orchid hunters", along with increasing consumer demand for orchids, also contribute to the endangerment of Borneo's native orchids.

Compelled by concern for the demise of Borneo's native orchids, Chairani Siregar of the College of Agriculture at the University of Tanjungpura (Indonesia) undertook a 3-year study to locate and record endangered native orchid species in West Borneo. According to Siregar, "until recently, there were few records kept of the orchids native to West Borneo. For this reason, research was conducted to identify and create

an inventory of all orchid species that exist (in West Borneo) before they and their habitats become extinct. The study was done in 10 counties and one municipal city in West Borneo. Orchids found were identified and recorded by species. A total of 197 species of orchids were identified."

Siregar is committed to cultivating all vulnerable and endangered species of orchids before they become extinct, adding that "local government intervention and participation in conservation, cultivation and marketing of orchids are necessary" for the popular flowers' survival.

Source: American Society for Horticultural Science

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