

New orchid species is discovered in the UC Botanical Garden collection

April 27 2010, By Cathy Cockrell



Ornithidium donaldeenodii (Photo courtesy UC Botanical Garden)

(PhysOrg.com) -- A Haitian orchid is enjoying celebrity status at the UC Botanical Garden, after scientists discovered that the long-time Garden resident is a distinct new species.

A low-growing plant with showy red-orange flowers, the plant has been in the Garden collection since the 1990s, bearing the name *Maxillaria croceorubens*. But recent [DNA analysis](#) of flower and leaf material from the orchid, provided by the Garden, confirmed that the plant, in fact, is genetically distinct from *M. croceorubens*; study of its physical form and structure confirm its uniqueness.

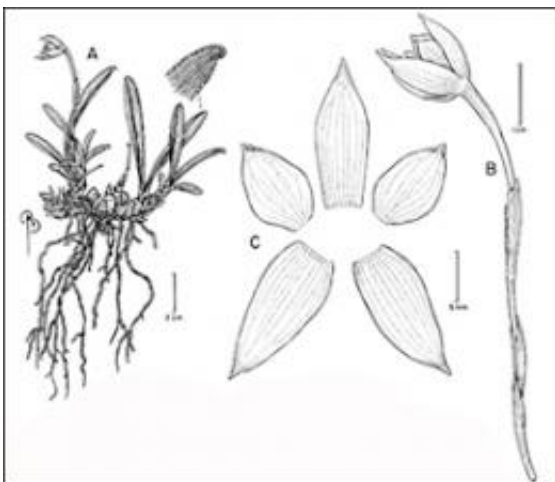
The new orchid species — described recently in *Lankesteriana*, the

international journal on orchidology — is named *Ornithidium donaldeenodii*, after orchidologist Donald Dod, who collected the specimen in the 1980s and served, in his later years, as a research associate for the UC Herbarium. Dod died in 2008, at 95.

"The authors thank the ghost of Donald D. Dod for providing us with samples of his *Ornithidium*, and Holly Forbes for her help at the UC Botanical Garden," wrote authors James Ackerman of the University of Puerto Rico and W. Mark Whitten of the Florida Museum of Natural History, in their scientific article.

A Protestant missionary stationed in the Caribbean who became a meticulous, self-taught orchidologist, Dod is said to have discovered more than 50 orchid species during his 17-year stay in Puerto Rico and subsequent residence in the Dominican Republic.

Dod collected the orchid now known as *O. donaldeenodii* in Pic Macaya National Park — located in the geographically isolated Massif de la Hotte, a mountain range in southwestern Haiti — as part of a USAID/Haiti commissioned study. The region boasts a "marvelous assemblage" of orchid species, as Dod and a coauthor once described it.



Ornithidium donaldehydodii details. (Bobbi Angell illustration)

The plant was part of Dod's personal collection until the 1990s, when he transferred his live specimens to the UC Botanical Garden.

"It is perhaps not hard to image that some new small organism had been overlooked," Paul Licht, the botanical garden's director, says of the recent discovery. "But when it's something like an orchid, which people have lusted after for many decades, it's almost mind boggling."

Visitors to the [UC Botanical Garden](#) can set eyes on Ornithidium donaldehydodii in the Orchid, Fern, and Carnivorous Plant House.

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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