

# **Known from flower stalls as 'Big Pink' orchid proved to be an undescribed wild species**

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'Big Pink' orchid, now also known to science as *Dendrochilum hampelii*, shows its flowers. Credit: Rogier van Vugt (Hortus botanicus, Leiden University)

As easy as it might seem, seeking new species among cultivated plants could be actually quite tricky. While looking into the undescribed orchid, known at the market as 'Big Pink', Bobby Sulistyo and his team were likely to find yet another man-made hybrid. In reality, they are now describing as 'new' a wild orchid species that has been sitting at the flower stalls since 2013. The story behind their discovery is published in the open access journal *PhytoKeys*.

While studying a cultivated plant might be quite a motivator and serve as a starting point for scientific quests around the world, the assumptions that one has found a [new species](#) at the florist's could easily be wrong. Not only is the place of origin, written on the label, often doubtful, but there is always the chance of accidentally describing a man-made hybrid as a new [species](#).

Such could have been the case of Bobby Sulistyo and his team when they discovered that although previously assumed impossible, the relatives of 'Big Pink', they were surveying, could also make human-assisted hybrids. Moreover, both of the specimens they have had at hand had come from uncertain place of origin.

However, the scientists conducted a series of sophisticated DNA analyses to conclude that firstly, 'Big Pink' is a separate species within its genus and then, that there is no evidence for it being an artificial hybrid. Eventually, the species was found in the wild as well. As a result, the orchid species was given the official name *Dendrochilum hampelii*.

In the wild, 'Big Pink' is found at around 1,200 m above sea level in the Philippines, where it harmlessly plants its roots on [tree trunks](#) and branches among mosses.

So far, little is known about the orchid's distribution in nature, so the researchers suggest its conservation status to be considered as Data Deficient according to the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#) (IUCN 2012).

**More information:** Sulisty B, Boos R, Cootes J, Gravendeel B (2015) *Dendrochilum hampelii* (Coelogyninae, Epidendroideae, Orchidaceae) traded as 'Big Pink' is a new species, not a hybrid: evidence from nrITS, matK and ycf1 sequence data. *PhytoKeys* 56: 83-97. [DOI: 10.3897/phytokeys.56.5432](#)

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