

Orchids Species and the Essence of Conservation

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Life gave me wonderful opportunities when I was invited to become a member of the International Orchid Conservation Committee, and when I received the honor to make a presentation for the first time at the 4th World orchid Conference held in Singapore in 1963. I was then 43 years of age.

Subsequently I would be invited as a speaker in World Orchid Conferences regularly as well as in several European Orchid Conferences. Eventually I initiated the idea to organize the first Asia Pacific Orchid Conference in 1984.

As a matter of etiquette I felt it was not proper to propose that this first regional conference be held in Thailand because the idea to create a Regional Conference was mine.

Therefore after due consideration it was felt that Japan was the best choice and was given full support to host the Conference, and Japan gladly accepted to be host to the First Asia Pacific Orchid Conference in 1984.

In 2011 I will be giving another presentation on the topic of Orchid Conservation to this 20th World Orchid Conference which is once again being held in Singapore. But then as I looked at past presentations I have made internationally over the last 46 years, I was surprised to discover that most of my presentations have touched on the issue of “Conservation.” As a result this forced me to take a deep look my own self to find out the reason why this theme kept recurring again and again within my own mind.

And then I discovered that within my own subconscious I have always been interested and concerned with the plight of ordinary people in society, those who have to struggle to make a living. I have always been interested in lives of ordinary people. I have observed their lives and have listened to their views on life starting from my own thoughts and based on my own life experience. I have done so while maintaining a certain realism but have never wavered from maintaining absolute fairness when considering all such issues no matter how strong external influences have been exerted in the past to make me change my mind.

For example on the issue of conservation of orchids I have in the past been offered financial incentives and prestigious positions in exchange for backing regulations aimed at controlling ordinary villagers living adjacent to areas endowed with rich natural resources under the pretext that such regulations would ensure the conservation of orchids for the benefit of society.

An initial conclusion I came to on this issue was that “Those trying to impose rules and regulations, using arguments of conservation such as the conservation of orchids or whatever, upon local people without a proper perspective of care, concern and understanding of such people will invariably bring about results that are opposite than the results expected.”

The issues of conservation of other resources such as the conservation of local arts and cultures share similarities in that if local people do not have a feeling of responsibility to preserve their own identity, and allow themselves to become overly influenced by external factors and by people coming from the outside, then they are endangering their own future and their ways of life. Conservation is therefore a responsibility that must be shared by all parties.

From an analysis of the root cause of the issues involved in conservation I wish to bring forth a fundamental reality that is needed to bring about success in conservation work. This reality is the element of diversity that controls the lives of peoples and animals all of which exist within a natural ecology that is itself subject to continual changes. This view of people, animals and nature living in an ecological system is very clear to me, and I feel that the issues of conservation need to be viewed from the outside along this perspective.

We therefore must accept this reality and show leadership in moving forward by helping local people realize their goals for a better life as an integral part of conservation.

Therefore by being aware of both the ecological perspectives and the needs of local people can we arrive at comprehensive and trustworthy solutions.

Furthermore understanding of the term conservation itself in order to achieve full and comprehensive results involves consideration of both the concept of conservation and the concept of development which are interrelated.

However neither of these two concepts ought to be considered separately, and the issue is the way these concepts are viewed within peoples' minds and how people behave as a result and how they learn from these concepts to enable them to make a proper living.

But when talking about these issues of men and nature I must mention that changes in nature are the basis for all life, especially peoples' lives.

Within the concepts of conservation and development the natural environment being a source of learning and wisdom should lead people to feel an attachment to the natural beauty of their ancestral land and similarly to feel a sense of care toward local people living in that natural environment.

And whereas within its learning process society exploits natural resources in order to facilitate peoples' lives, but local people are naturally endowed with an instinct of conservation in their subconscious and would normally not strive for over-development with its harmful effects to all.

As a general declaration we may say that "Exploitation of natural resources that are essential for local people's livelihood should be done in a sustainable way so as to provide long-term benefits to all. People ought to be educated on the fundamentals of conservation. This would lead to clarity of purpose, to good understanding of negative effects of over-development, to knowledge about careful exploitation of natural resources free of long-lasting damages to the ways of life of local people and to society in general."

If people become overly addicted to convenience and comfort which are the results of over-development of material products, then people can become misguided and forget themselves to the detriment of society.

Therefore as people are used to living in the midst of material affluence, which has been their chosen path of development, they can be careless and forget who they are within the natural world, then it will be difficult for them to maintain mindfulness and reason within their minds and not be influenced by such material environment.

But whichever environment people live in, if people do not practice mindfulness and forget where they are within the natural world then they are bound to come to a dead-end.

Everything that I have just mentioned came to me after years spent analyzing issues about the conservation of orchids. But of course the cause of the problem does not only affect the conservation of orchids, but the cause of the problem also affects other areas that people are concerned with and will result in similar damages.

Finally I would like to draw an important conclusion that the success of conservation efforts, in whichever area one may choose, lies in the hearts and minds of people involved and the presence or absence of values and morality. People who have succeeded in life and who are widely recognized in society are assumed to abide by strong values and morality without fail. And they will likely achieve that level of goodness if they go through this learning process of observing the ways of nature with diligence and happiness.

If every person is interested in educating himself by going through the learning process mentioned above, that can also be described by the word "meditation", then this world can certainly achieve peace without fail.

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Professor Rapee Sagarik is Thailand's foremost orchid expert and a revered educator. Prof. Sagarik founded the Orchid Society of Thailand in 1957. He was the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 9th World Orchid Conference in Thailand in 1979. Prof. Sagarik was responsible for the first orchid library in Thailand which was opened in December 1993.