

Reintroduction of native orchids into the wild in El Valle, Panama

Project outline

This project is an instrumental part of our orchid conservation strategy in El Valle. A widespread practice of wild orchid gathering among local people has dramatically diminished native orchid populations in this tiny Panamanian town and the surrounding mountains. It is thus imperative to reintroduce these orchids into the wild so that this place will be a paradise for them again. In close cooperation with the Institute of Agricultural Investigation of Panama (Instituto de Investigación Agropecuaria de Panamá, IDIAP), APROVACA plans to reproduce eight native orchid species in its nurseries and plant them in their original habitat. Once the reintroduction process is completed, our rangers will try to prevent the exploitation of the precious flowers from occurring again.



Eriopsis biloba (left) and *Neomoorea irrorata* (right)

Background

A wide variety of orchids, including notably some species endemic to Panama, were widespread across the town of El Valle and its surrounding mountains. The second largest inhabited volcanic crater in the world and the unique climate it produces used to provide favorable living conditions not only to humans but also to other species, including notably orchids. Indeed, El Valle is home to dozens of orchid species, some of which are endemic to this place.

However, this exceptional diversity of orchids was exploited. Although unauthorized extraction of natural resources in the mountains surrounding El Valle was prohibited by Panamanian laws, some local inhabitants began gathering the precious wild orchids, and selling them on the market. This unlawful business turned out to be lucrative, which led to a significant decrease in their populations. We created APROVACA in 2001 in order to prevent further exploitation of

the flowers from happening and save them from extinction. APROVACA successfully persuaded many of the former orchid gatherers to discontinue their business, and set up a ranger station in cooperation with the Panamanian National Authority of the Environment (Autoridad Nacional del Medio Ambiente, ANAM) to watch over the protected land. However, because of the widespread orchid gathering that lasted over many years, wild orchids in this region still find themselves in a critical situation. It is imperative to augment their populations with plants grown in our nurseries.



Acineta chrysantha (left) and *Houlletia tigrina* (right)

Reintroducing orchids into the local forests

Faced with this situation, APROVACA conceived a project of reintroduction of orchids into the local forests. We identified eight orchid species particularly badly affected by excessive gathering: *Acineta chrysantha*, *Cycnoches warszewiczii*, *Eriopris biloba*, *Gongora armeniaca*, *Gongora gibba*, *Gongora tricolor*, *Houlletia tigrina*, and *Neomoorea irrorata*. With the technical assistance of the IDIAP, we will reproduce and cultivate these orchids in our nurseries. Once they grow sufficiently large, we will plant them on the protected land. When the reintroduction process is completed, our rangers will watch over the orchids until they start reproducing and the land is filled with their offsprings.

Donate to us now!

To receive adequate technical assistance and accelerate the whole process of reintroduction, we are in need of donations. We wish to collect around \$50,000 for this project. Please help us to conserve biodiversity – our common heritage from Mother Earth. To make donations with a credit card go to the APROVACA website <http://aprovaca.webs.com> and click the donation button or contact us at aprovaca@hotmail.com

