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Community Involvement in Orchid Conservation

In 2000 the Australasian Native Orchid Society, Victorian Group Inc. made the decision to become proactive in orchid conservation. We were of the opinion that government organisations were over stretched when it came to devoting the resources needed to protect our native orchids and that as a society we could assist in many ways. Through working with the authorities responsible for orchid preservation we have been able to make a substantial contribution, in some cases taking a primary role, in the management and recommendations for the preservation of habitats and orchid species. The activities we have been involved with include monitoring, searching, cultivation, propagation, rescue digs, translocation, associated species mapping, reintroduction, environmental management and public education. Collectively our members have a wide range of skills.

Whether it is in observing orchids over many years, thereby developing considerable identification skills, which prove invaluable when searching for endangered species. Other members have developed cultivation skills which prove valuable when maintaining ex-situ populations. The varied professional background of our members provides a wide ranging set of skills which can be used to assist in identifying associated and invasive plant species, population mapping and monitoring skills and public awareness promotion, amongst others. Many members have retired and can be called upon to assist at short notice. As a volunteer group that is dedicated to native orchids, we provide continuity to a project that is not necessarily present in official organisations. Employees can leave to find other employment or be transferred to other projects as the need arises.

This paper will present the following:

- Monitoring work that we have conducted which is now starting to reveal meaningful information;
- Demonstrate how we undertake searching activities for new colonies of threatened species;
- Present our home laboratory where we have been able to develop our skills in propagating orchids from seed;
- Show how we have been involved in the ongoing environmental management of several sites which are now showing the benefits of our efforts;
- Show our involvement in orchid rescue, translocation, re-introduction and the follow-up work that we have undertaken.

Through this paper I plan to demonstrate practical cases where community organisations can make an effective contribution to orchid conservation and in doing so inspire other community groups to follow our example, as well as encourage official organisations to tap in to this valuable community resource.