

## A New Orchid Record for Tobago, W.I. - *Maxillaria porrecta* Lindl.

On January 18, 2014, I was passing over the Main Ridge of Tobago, at about 520 m elevation, when I saw, for the first time, an arboreal orchid in bloom about 4 m high in a roadside tree. I stopped to have a look.

It was a healthy display of yellowish flowers that immediately attracted my attention.

The clump bore a cluster with about 25 - 30 flowers, each flower approximately 2.5 cm across, with three sepals and two petals, each about 1.2 cm long, growing out of a basal scape up to 16 cm long (Fig. 1). The inside of the lateral petals and sepals were white at the base gradually becoming a beautiful deep yellow. The outside of the petals started as a buffy-mottled white, brushed by a deep pink at the outer tips, which curled over, exposing the pinkish tips. The outside of the labellum was white, about 1.5 cm long, with a deep magenta or maroon colour at the tip (Fig. 2). The leaves each grew out of a pseudobulb, which was from 3.5 to 4.5 cm in diameter, and extended into a slender, elongate deep green leaf, about 20 to 25 cm in length and up to 4 to 5 cm in width (Fig. 3).

I returned for another look on January 23, 2014, to find all the flowers withered and closed. I climbed the tree to photograph the cluster of bulbs, leaves and flowers, only to be driven off by a savage attack from a colony of large, aggressive red ants. From then on, the plant was unremarkable, and for the most part, un-noticeable. Another visit on March 21, 2014, showed the orchid still healthy, but with no sign of flowering. I was unable to discern the species of the host tree or the red ant species.

On January 16, 2015, as I was back in Tobago, I stopped to check on the orchid. It was in bloom, with about 20 flowers. I photographed the orchid, and sent photos to Yasmin Baksh-Comeau who was the curator of the National Herbarium of T&T (abbreviated to TRIN hereafter) at that time. She was not familiar with this orchid, and asked that I send her a sample of the flowers, leaves and bulbs. Figure 3 shows the parts of the plant I submitted to Dr Baksh-Comeau. Her response was:

*“Thanks for sending the orchid specimen from Tobago. I identified it today as **Maxillaria porrecta**. Since we do not have a specimen in our collection from Tobago we will keep it and add it to the reference collection ... we have a few specimens from Trinidad dating back to the 19th century up to the 1990s. But we have not had any from Tobago before according to our records. Its presence in Tobago begs the question whether is it a recent introduction (deliberate or accidental) or overlooked by naturalists/botanist not being there at the right time and place.”* (Baksh-Comeau, pers. comm.).

The specimen was matched against voucher specimens

accessioned in TRIN including Broadway s.n (TRIN 22672, AMES 67049). Details of the records from Trinidad are included in Baksh-Comeau *et al.* (2016) and are also available on GBIF.org (Sankar *et al.* 2023).

So, this random stop turned out to be the first record of this orchid for Tobago! In 2016, the orchid was totally gone, with no sign of any leaves or bulbs. To this day, even with constant watching and looking, I have not seen it again.

It is worth noting that it is prohibited to remove plant material from the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, and that the sampling described here was done in collaboration with the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago. I am grateful to Yasmin Baksh-Comeau for her help in preparing this Note for publication.



**Fig. 1.** *Maxillaria porrecta* in situ. at Main Ridge Tobago. Photo Matt Kelly, 18 January 2014.



**Fig. 2.** *Maxillaria porrecta* flower. Main Ridge Tobago. Photo Matt Kelly, 17 January 2015.



**Fig. 1.** Specimen of *Maxillaria porrecta* collected at Main Ridge Tobago, for the National Herbarium . Photo Matt Kelly, 17 January 2015.

## REFERENCES

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