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Orchid knowledge is for all at Lankester Garden's website



(Infocom) — Orchid lovers now have a place where they can learn all there is to learn about thousands of species of the Orchidaceae family. And they don't even have to leave their homes to do so. The Lankester Botanical Garden has made available a free website, www.epidendra.org, which offers a virtual library about these remarkable plants.

The website has been prepared by renowned scientists with the University of Costa Rica (UCR) and is intended for both orchid researchers and aficionados.

Those who visit the website will be able to access specific data about each species, from their "birth certificate" all the way to their characteristics, photos, and more. Each orchid

species is registered by the person who discovers it, and its "birth certificate" includes all details about the specimen. Also available are geographic distribution maps, illustrations, pollen images, links to DNA sequencing sites, and more.

Researchers find and register new species of orchids by comparing samples against similar ones that have been previously identified. But if the particular species has been registered in another country, it is very hard and costly to find the registration document. Thanks to this virtual library, it will be possible to do just that, just by logging on to the website. Those who will benefit the most are researchers in Third World countries, where most orchid species are present.

The website was launched last week, and it is expected to grow at a pace of 1,500 documented species of orchids per year.

In Costa Rica alone, there are 1,200 orchid species properly identified, distributed along 178 genera — making it one of the countries with the highest density of orchids in the world, in relation to its relative size.

For a plant to be catalogued as an orchid, it needs to have a structure called a "column" in its flower, which is a fusion of masculine and feminine reproductive organs. An orchid has three sepals and three petals, of which one of the last is highly modified and is known as lip or labellum.

Orchids are epiphytes, meaning they live attached to a tree trunk or limb, growing wherever they can find support and nutrients produced by the decomposition of plant matter.

Founded in 1973, the mission of the Lankester Botanical Garden (part of the University of Costa Rica) is to promote conservation, enjoyment and sustainable use of the epiphytic flora through scientific research, horticulture and environmental education. It's located in Paraiso, Cartago, just 26 kilometers from San Jose