

## Do your plants have correct names?

For orchids, only 2 things are inevitable:

**Death and Taxonomists** (Kyle Saunders, 2023).

With all the taxonomic name changes of the last 15 years, many plants now have labels reflecting something that was correct a few years ago. Such cases are easy to detect and correct, if you are willing to look up the names in the RHS, AOS or Orchid Roots data bases.

However, there are other situations, where you need a PhD in orchid lore, to get to the root of the problem. I can illustrate this with a couple of examples:

Somewhere hidden in the mists of time, a grower presented a *Phragmipedium* to a group of early AOS judges. The plant was presented as a *Phragmipedium schlimii*, and when awarded an 82 pt. AM/AOS, it was given the clonal name 'Wilcox'. This plant is extremely vigorous, and it still shows up in more than half of the shows I attend.

The only problem is, that it is not a pure *Phrag. schlimii*, but rather *Phrag. Cardinale* (= *Sedenii* x *schlimii*), which makes it **25% longifolium** & **75% schlimii**. Basically, the whole world knows this, but since it was awarded as a *schlimii*, most vendors still sell it as *schlimii*.



**schlimii**  
**'Wilcox'**



**schlimii**

The two most recent **cultural** awards to this plant (in 2016 & 2020) attempt to clarify this, by listing the plant as: *Phrag. Cardinale* 'schlimii Wilcox'.



**94 pt. CCE/AOS, 2016**  
**Photo: Bryan Ramsay**

However, this still leaves vendors in a lurch. They can use the original name this plant was awarded under, or the current designation without the AM/AOS.

Perhaps the best solution is to show both on the label?

Another famous plant, which was found to be something different from what it was awarded as, is *Cattleya walkeriana* 'Kenny' AM-FCC/AOS.



There were warning signs:

- ♦ This species usually blooms with a single flower (rarely 2 or 3).
- ♦ This species usually blooms from an inflorescence that arises from the rhizome.

The plants presented for judging had:

1989 AM: 2 inflorescences from the top of PBs, with 4 flowers each.

2008 FCC: 14 inflorescences from the top of PBs, with 47 flowers & 4 buds.

Subsequently this plant has been identified as *Cattleya Snow Blind* (= *Angelwalker* x *walkeriana*). The AOS has corrected their award listings, but many vendors are still selling it as a species.

The next example comes from *Paphiopedilum*. For a while the *Paph. villosum*, var. *annamense* seedlings coming to the market, were actually standard tipo plants. *Not all villosums from Annam* (= Vietnam) *are variety annamense!*

The difference is in the color:

When you remove the green background from the dorsal, what appears to be a brown center line turns red on a white background.



**Tipo**



**var. annamense**

Those examples are all fairly obvious. There are other cases, where somebody has to let you in on the secret. At one of the GNYOS shows, probably around 2005, I had two wrong label experiences:

I was clerking for the ribbon judging. That year I was assigned to one of the Paphiopedilum teams, and the first plant registered was Paph. Angela (niveum x fairrieanum). However, the flower looked something like this:

Clearly a hybrid between Paph. delenatii, and one of the multi-floral species, but I don't know that group well enough to make a clear ID.

For comparison, the real Paph. Angela, (= niveum x fairrieanum) comes out looking like these examples:



It

took me a while to convince the AOS judges on that team, that the flower in the display was both misidentified, and registered in the wrong class.

While I was working for one vendor at that show, another vendor (Mr. X, from a now defunct nursery), who knew my passion for Paphiopedilum, confided the following to me:

I think that the reason the **Paph. Sugersuite** (= *emersonii* x *niveum*) I have for sale have such large flowers, is that they were probably made with *Paph. hangianum* as a parent (in place of *Paph. emersonii*).



At that time the *Paph. hangianum* species was illegal in the US (both the species, and as a parent in hybrids). The first semi-legal plants came into the US

via the WOC in Miami in 2007, where they were released for sale by mistake.

Based on Mr. X's suspicion, I declined to buy any of those plants; I just took the photo on the right. But, this means that there might be plants with suspect parentage in circulation (if they still survive). The correct name for (*hangianum* x *niveum*) = Chou-Yi Yuki.

Whenever a new species is discovered, it takes a while for legal plants to reach the US market. Thus, there is usually a period of several years, where only smuggled, and/or mis-labelled, plants are in circulation.

Another source of incorrect labelling arise in Asia. In both Japan and Thailand, in the commercial market sector, the concept of 'true species' is interpreted rather loosely. As Kristen Uthus reports it from Japan: 'If it looks like a Neo, they call it a Neo'. I have fallen for it myself:



I purchased a nice red '**Beni-Komachi**' from Seed Engei. It, as well as the yellow '**Kouhou**' on the right are both hybrids.

All strong colored yellow, green, red, pink or purple 'Neos' are actually hybrids. The strongest colors we can find in a true Neo, are what we see in the well known 'Shu-Ten-Nou' (to the right).



The final example also originates in Asia, though in Thailand this time. Thai nurseries have produced thousands of '**line bred**' *Vanda coerulea* over the past 30 years or so.

However, the majority of these plants are NOT (If it looks blue, they call it 'coerulea'). I have discussed this issue with Dr. Motes, who confirmed all my suspicions, and backed it up with a reference to DNA testing.



There are 3 easy check points in evaluating a *V. coerulea*, if any one of them is off, it is a hybrid:

1. The petals twist 180° (you see the backside).
2. The flower has faint tessellation (strong tessellation = a hybrid).
3. The plant has very short leaves, about 4-5" (10-12 cm) each.



The above photo is of a wild collected plant. You can clearly see that the petals twist, and the tessellation is very faint.

The photo to the left shows the short leaves typical of this species.

The following photos show 4 flowers, all sold as *Vanda coerulea*.

My comments are:

- #1 ***V. coerulea***
- #2 **Possibly** (I need to see the plant to be certain)
- #3 **Nope, a hybrid.**
- #4 **Most definitely a hybrid**

Similar to the Neos, it is not that the Thai nurseries are deliberately trying to cheat



anyone. They are simply using the same term for all Vandas with blue flowers.

The final photo is a plant posted on Ebay as a pink *V. coerulea* (they do exist). However, with leaves this long, it is obviously a hybrid.



With CITES restrictions on many popular orchids, there will always be some mis-labelled plants in circulation. The only way to avoid these, is to buy only from trusted suppliers.

We can't expect AOS judges to be experts on all the 30-35,000+ species, and 250,000+ hybrids. But we can urge them to listen to, and perhaps solicit input from, experienced growers.

I had one encounter with a student judge some years ago. She brought several plants to an orchid society auction, one of which was of interest to me. However, as soon as I saw the plant, I knew it was mis-labelled (*Paph. lawrenceanum* has a very distinctive mottled foliage, and the plant in question did not).

When I brought this to her attention, she immediately blew me off. How dare I think that an orchid from her cherished Alma Mater could be mis-labelled! This now accredited AOS judge regrettably still evidences the same closed mind set in judging sessions.