

EPIPOGIUM APHYLLUM Sw. IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

By R. A. GRAHAM

While searching for *Epipogium* on July 18th, this year, in one of the very many woods in Bucks, v.c. 24, which would appear to be suitable for it, I was luckily rewarded in finding what later turned out to be a scattered colony of twenty-two plants, with a total of twenty-five flowering shoots. The spot is one of the many in this and neighbouring counties that I had searched without success on several previous occasions. Most of the flowering shoots were small, less than three inches in height above ground level, but two were fine examples, attaining five inches and bearing three flowers.

The locality, which is necessarily a closely-kept secret, is a typical Chiltern wood where beech predominates. The canopy, locally heavy, is on the whole rather more open than what one might have expected to be ideal for this orchid, and a few plants grew in comparatively light conditions and amongst the type of ground vegetation that invades these woods whenever light gives a chance. In no way did the wood appear to be markedly different from many others in this general area.

The soil was clearly well drained, though moist, and whereas a few plants grew in a deep mat of decaying leaves, some were on patches where there was practically no leaf whatsoever. It was noted by a careful parting of the soil, that the underground system was apparently not growing in decaying leaf mould, but actually in the mineral soil. Except in one case, chalk was either at or nearly at the surface – in the single exception the soil appeared to be a rich sand, though no doubt in capillary contact with chalk below.

In general appearance, this orchid is delicate, attractive, and very pallid. The stem is a pale straw colour, with one or two scales of the same colour or slightly darker. The flowers are rather large – about the size of a nickel threepenny bit when fully extended – and nod slightly on their short stalks.

The lip, which is uppermost, is the palest possible pink, with raised markings of what is perhaps magenta. The sepals and petals, which together give a somewhat palmate appearance, are aureolin yellow* – perhaps better described as a very pale yellowish-straw colour. The larger examples look more than anything else like a plant-ghost, due to the pallid colouring in the darker surroundings.

A specimen was presented to the Kew herbarium, where hitherto no British *Epipogium* existed. A second specimen was cut and presented to Mr. Lousley so that he could take photographs in the more satisfactory conditions of his home – some of these were included in the *Illustrated London News*. Both these two specimens bore only one flower. A third specimen with two flowers was cut for my own herbarium. It was not intended to take any more, and those who saw the plant *in situ* were asked to make do with a photograph record. However, slugs were active, and three examples were found eaten through at the base but fresh enough for general purposes. One of these, a splendid plant with three flowers, is now also in my herbarium. Of the remaining two, which each had two flowers, one is to be presented to the Cambridge University herbarium, while the other was circulated to Professor Tutin and Dr. Butcher for purposes of illustration, and will remain finally in the herbarium of Leicester University. My own specimens will eventually go to Oxford University.

A later visit showed that the activity of slugs had continued. One plant was, however, found which clearly showed that seed had been produced and dispersed. This specimen is now in the British Museum (Natural History).

* Royal Horticultural Society's Colour Chart

PLATE 4.



Epipogium in Buckinghamshire.

Photo : R. C. L. Burges