

Dracuphilia

A Gothic Romance

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Gary is a USDA/APHIS licensed importer of CITES protected material. Gary lives in San Francisco where he cultivates mostly Draculas and Masdevallias. He spends several months per year in Columbia and Ecuador studying Draculas in situ. Gary studied the taxonomy of Draculas for two years with Ken Cameron at the University of Wisconsin. Gary states his ambition is to someday have a finca (country estate) of his own in Columbia.

Draculas are New World orchids. They are mainly centered in the top half of Peru and in Ecuador. Some grow hydroponically. In the dry forests Draculas bloom all at once.

The taxonomy of Draculas is in flux so don't change your labels yet. The lips mimic fungus. Draculas are generalists when it comes to pollination. It is easy to create hybrids in a greenhouse setting, sometimes they do so without human help.

Some Draculas to try which are medium growers and not too demanding are *D. vesperililla*, *D. saulii*, *D. cordobae*.

HUMAN IMPACTS

Draculas are often clustered in areas at the top of mountains. An important area is Reserva los Cedros which consists of 17,000 acres of premontane wet tropical forest and cloud forest. See reservaloscedros.org. It is 60 kilometers northwest of Quito. An all-day trip by bus, truck, and mule is required to reach the preserve. It is part of the Choco Phytogeographical Zone, one of the most biologically diverse and endemic habitats on earth. An extensive trail system has been developed but most of the 17,000 acres remain



Photograph by Susan Reed
Dracula lotax from Sue Reed's orchidarium

untracked and rarely visited by humans. Many Draculas grow in only very small places. Some seem to grow only on fallen logs. New species are continually being discovered. It is becoming increasingly difficult to protect cloud forest areas.

A lot of mining of mining is starting up in this area. Mining companies are buying mining concessions. People may own the surface but others can own the underground resources. Some of the preserve was given away to a Canadian mining company which completely destroyed the area. Mining companies have terrorized and pressured locals to move away. Agricultural uses have destroyed habitat by grazing or by farmers selling out to mining companies. Many orchids are going through the woodchippers.

Can collecting be balanced with deforestation? Local collectors can completely vacuum an area clean of orchids when they learn of demand for the plants. CITES does not prevent local poaching because CITES is not administered in local areas. CITES also blocks transfer of species for research and for legal production.

There is a lot of orchid fraud on Ebay. People offer to sell 10 *Dracula simia* seeds. There is no such thing as getting 10 individual *Dracula*

seeds. Poachers also paint flowers being offered for sale.