

Catasetums

Part 3 - The Black Knight and Ten Dragons

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In this, the last part of the series on the bizarre world of Catasetums, we will look at four intriguing species and tell the tale of the Black Knight and the Ten Dragons that have ruled the Dark Ages.

C*atasetum tenebrosum* from Peru and western Brazil is one of the easiest species in the genus to grow, and only requires a very brief resting period. The specific epithet is derived from the Latin *tenebrosus* meaning “dark” or “gloomy”, in reference to the very dark colours of the petals and sepals. The sepals and petals are chocolate brown and have a velvety texture giving them an almost black appearance. The lip color is usually in a shade of green. The inflorescence is produced on a developing new growth and produces around 15 male flowers.

Catasetum fergusonii was only described in 2008 from a specimen collected by Dr. George B. Ferguson in Peru in 1976, and in whose honor the species was named. The type specimen was sent to Selby Botanical Gardens where it lay unpublished for several years, until Dr. Wesley Higgins rectified the situation. Five plants of this species were awarded by the American Orchid Society between its discovery and 2008.

Catasetum cernuum is a robust species from Brazil that produces a 45 cm arching inflorescence with up to 24 male flowers. This arching habit of the inflorescence gives rise to the specific epithet meaning “bent forward” in Latin. *Catasetum cernuum* is easily recognised by its flat, trilobed lip, with two prominent notches at the apex, giving the flower a



Catasetum tenebrosum.

Photographer: Nollie Cilliers



Catasetum fergusonii 'Yvonne'.

Photographer: Jay Norris – jay@ravenvision.ca

bat-like resemblance. It requires a cooler winter with only a short rest similar to *Catasetum tenebrosum*, and is best grown under shadier conditions than most other *Catasetum* species.

Catasetum callosum is a warm growing species found along the tributaries of the Amazon River and on the lowland plains of northern South America. The specific epithet refers to the prominent callus at the base of the lip. The arching inflorescence carries up to 30 male flowers; these are of similar size to the male flowers of *Catasetum tenebrosum*. The colour of the sepals and petals is from light green to dark green or brown and the lip is similarly coloured from cream to dark green or brown.

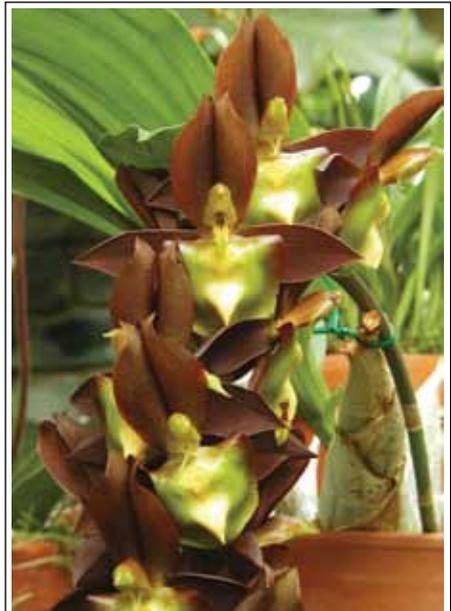
The remarkable colouration of this group of *Catasetum*s bewitched the orchid judges in the granting of several quality awards to these four species. *Catasetum tenebrosum* gained twenty Awards of Merit and six Highly Commended Certificate awards. The other three species, being rarer in cultivation, received less acclaim.

The very dark colouration of the four species not only captivated the orchid judges, but also inspired hybridizers to introduce them into hybridizing. The obvious choice for partners was the "dinner plate" species and hybrids. Beall combined *Catasetum tenebrosum* with *Catasetum pileatum* in 1979 to produce *Catasetum Pileabrosium Green*, the colour of these hybrids tended to the green or white from the *Catasetum pileatum* parent, which is dominant for colour in its progeny. Four cultivars have been awarded by the American Orchid Society. Neptune crossed *Catasetum tenebrosum* with *Catasetum expansum* in 1996 to produce *Catasetum Black Knight*, and as the name suggests, was a blend of the best of both species. The cultivar 'Jardin Botanique de Montreal' received an Award of Merit of 85% from the American Orchid Society. *Catasetum Crownfox Voodoo* was registered by RF Orchids as a hybrid between *Catasetum Susan Fuchs* and *Catasetum tenebrosum* in 2001, and it looks very much like



***Catasetum callosum* 'Baker's Chocolate Goblin' HCC/AOS.**

Photographer: Loren Batchman



***Catasetum Black Knight* 'Jardin Botanique de Montreal' AM/AOS**

Photographer: Dr. Gilles Murray, Montreal Botanical Garden



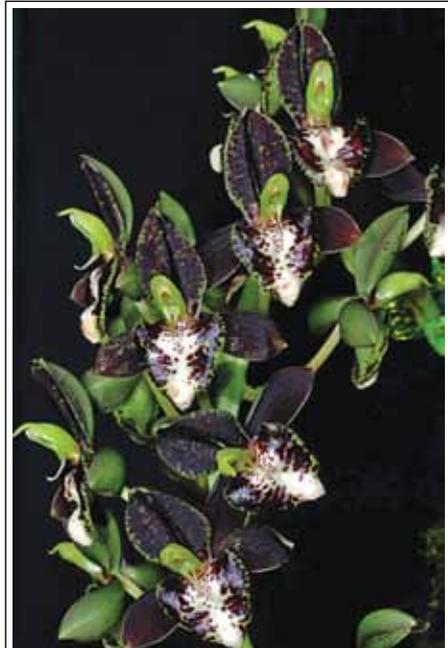
***Catasetum* Crownfox Voodoo 'Sunset Valley Orchids' AM/AOS.**

Photographer: Fred Clarke

an enlarged *Catasetum tenebrosum*. Two cultivars gained Award of Merit awards from the American Orchid Society, namely 'Sunset Valley Orchids' and 'Anthony Capitano'.

The excellent qualities of *Catasetum* Donna Wise (*tenebrosum* x *Orchidglade*) was already discussed in part one of this series, and this hybrid will be very important in future *Catasetiinae* hybrids. Nine quality awards have been granted to this grex by the American Orchid Society. Combining *Catasetum* Donna Wise again with *Catasetum tenebrosum*, one of its parents, Brent Baker registered *Catasetum* Brent's Black Hawk in 2009. The cultivar 'Priscilla' already received a Highly Commended Certificate in 2008 that was upgraded to an Award of Merit on the next flowering the following year. *Catasetum* Donna Wise was also crossed with *Catasetum* Crownfox Voodoo to produce *Catasetum* De Etta Harris.

Catasetum Karen Lingerfelt, the progeny of *Catasetum* Crownfox Voodoo



***Catasetum* Jumbo Ego 'David Bird' AM/AOS.**

Photographer: Dr. Craig J. Plahn

and *Catasetum* Spotted Dragon, was registered in 2004. The cultivar 'Live Oak's Deep Ruby' received an Award of Merit in the same year. The flower colour of this cultivar was a rich burgundy with a contrasting yellow callus in the centre of the lip.

Catasetum Jumbo Ego 'David Bird' AM/AOS, a hybrid between *Catasetum atratum* and *Catasetum tenebrosum*, is one of the most charming *Catasetum tenebrosum* hybrids. The green column of the flower contrasts beautifully with the white lip and chocolate brown sepals and petals. Two other *Catasetum tenebrosum* hybrids received awards from the American Orchid Society. *Catasetum* Hilltop's Dingbat 'Junior' (*tenebrosum* x Thinger Dinger), and two cultivars of *Catasetum* Ten Dragons (Dragon's Teeth x *tenebrosum*), 'Algonquin' and 'Glo', were granted Award of Merit awards.

Catasetum tenebrosum and *Catasetum cernuum* were crossed by Mrs. R Levy to produce *Catasetum* Midnight Madness, again combining the dark colours of the two parents to great effect. Another five hybrids with *Catasetum cernuum* as parent were registered, but none of them received any awards from the American Orchid Society to date.

Catasetum Ismenia (callosum x expansum) is the only *Catasetum callosum* hybrid that was ever registered, and has never been awarded. The only *Catasetum fergusonii* offspring is *Catasetum* Brecko Black Knight (*fergusonii* x Breckinridge Onyx). Three cultivars have been granted quality awards, with the cultivar 'Cat's Paw' AM/AOS the most stunning, with the flower colour described as oxblood red.

Several secrets need still to be revealed by these dark species and their progeny and the mysterious avenue of



***Catasetum* Ten Dragons.**

Photographer: Fred Clarke



Catasetum Brecko Black Knight 'Cat's Paw Black Magic' HCC/AOS.

Photographer: Dr. Craig J. Plahn

intergeneric hybrids need to be explored even further, but that is another story...

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Catasetum Brecko Black Knight 'Cat's Paw Hat Trick' HCCAOS.

Photographer: Dr. Craig J. Plahn