

Orchid and Species of the Year 2012

Polystachya victoriae

'The Queen'

AM/SAOC 86%

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Having only seen one or two photographs of *Polystachya victoriae* Kraenzl. in books and orchid journals before, we were amazed to find some plants for sale at a local society's autumn show.

They looked even better in real life than the pictures we had seen. We bought two plants and found a space in the greenhouse for them where we could keep a close eye on them. In the spring of that year both plants started to grow new shoots after being dormant for some time. In addition, we then had the opportunity to acquire more seedlings which would allow for enough plants to sell to some of our customers. In autumn of the following year the two original plants and most of the seedlings we had bought flowered. We selected the best plant with the best colouring and fullest flowers to be entered for the W.O.S. Autumn Show where it was chosen as best African and Mascarene species. The judges were all thrilled with the plant and it was awarded at the show.

Polystachya victoriae is critically endangered as its natural habitat of subtropical and tropical dry forests in Cameroon and Gabon is under constant threat from destruction. The plants are rather small and the minute pseudobulbs are only seen when the plant is dormant. The colour of the flowers may vary from almost pure white to white with a pink flush. There have been considerable differences in

the fullness of the flowers, with some having narrow segments resulting in a very open appearance. The most striking part of the flowers is possibly the bright yellow pseudopollinia which can be seen at the uppermost part of the flower.

We have grown our plants of *Polystachya victoriae* with other deciduous plants such as members of the *Catasetinae* and *Habenaria medusa*. This allows us to control the watering, as they should be kept dry when dormant. All the polystachyas were planted in a fine potting mix consisting of four parts fine bark, one part peat and one part fine silica sand. We have not tried growing these plants mounted, but suspect they will do quite well as the roots will be able to dry out much quicker and they can be kept rather dry during their winter rest. Watering should start only when the new shoot reaches a size of about 1 cm as they are susceptible to rot if kept too moist at an early stage. The plants received fertilizer, with all our other plants, at least once a week. A high nitrogen content fertilizer is given during spring and summer and is replaced with a high potassium feed from about March onwards. Once the plants are dormant watering and fertilizing can stop. *



Polystachya victoriae 'The Queen'.

Photographer: N. Cilliers