

PHRAGMIPEDIUM (PHRAG.) CULTURE

Phragmipedium (*frag-mee-PEE-dee-um*) another member of the slipper orchid family; these plants are native to South America and grow there in a tropical climate. Most of the species grow in moist conditions enjoying cool flowing water at their roots, although the exceptions to the rule are the long petaled types, *caudatum* and *wallisii*. The plants look similar to some of the strap leaf Paphiopedilum, forming a fan of leaves which produce a flower spike at their centre when mature. These spikes develop multiple flowers either on branching stems or consecutively. The number of widely accepted species is around 20 and from these a large number of hybrids have been developed. The pace of development increases each time a new species is discovered, offering a new attribute to use in the development of the Genus.



Phrag. Grande var. Microchilum

TEMPERATURE:

Approximately 18-22°C day-time temperature and 13-15°C night-time. The drop in temperature from day to night is an important part of the plants growing culture.



Phrag. Dollgoldi 'Golden Wings'

LIGHT:

Most Phragmipediums do not require high light levels to grow, and the simplest method of determining this is to hold your hand over the plant, if it casts a shadow, the light level is too high.

WATERING & FERTILISER:

Where ever possible, use rainwater. This is because it is pH neutral and free from salts and additives. Water regularly to keep the roots wet and fresh; this is better than standing the plants in stagnant water. It is beneficial to add a little feed regularly, high nitrogen during the growth season and high potash to assist during the flowering season. About once a month, use only water with no addition of feed, this will help flush out any excess salt build up from the feed.

POTTING:

When the plant has finished flowering, it is beneficial to change the potting mix and check the root system of the plant. Phragmipediums enjoy being relatively pot bound. A potting media which retains high levels of moisture is preferable, such as sphagnum moss or Rockwool. The Rockwool is available in a number of forms developed for plants, but the cubes, either 1cm or 2cm depending on plant size are the most commonly used as they hold plenty of water but allow air gaps between each other. A top dressing of bark is recommended for the ease of ongoing care. The long petaled species are happier growing in a drier mix of bark and Perlite as used for Paphiopedilums,



Phrag. Ruby Slipper
(Photo taken by Mr. S. Than)

Phrag. Bessae



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

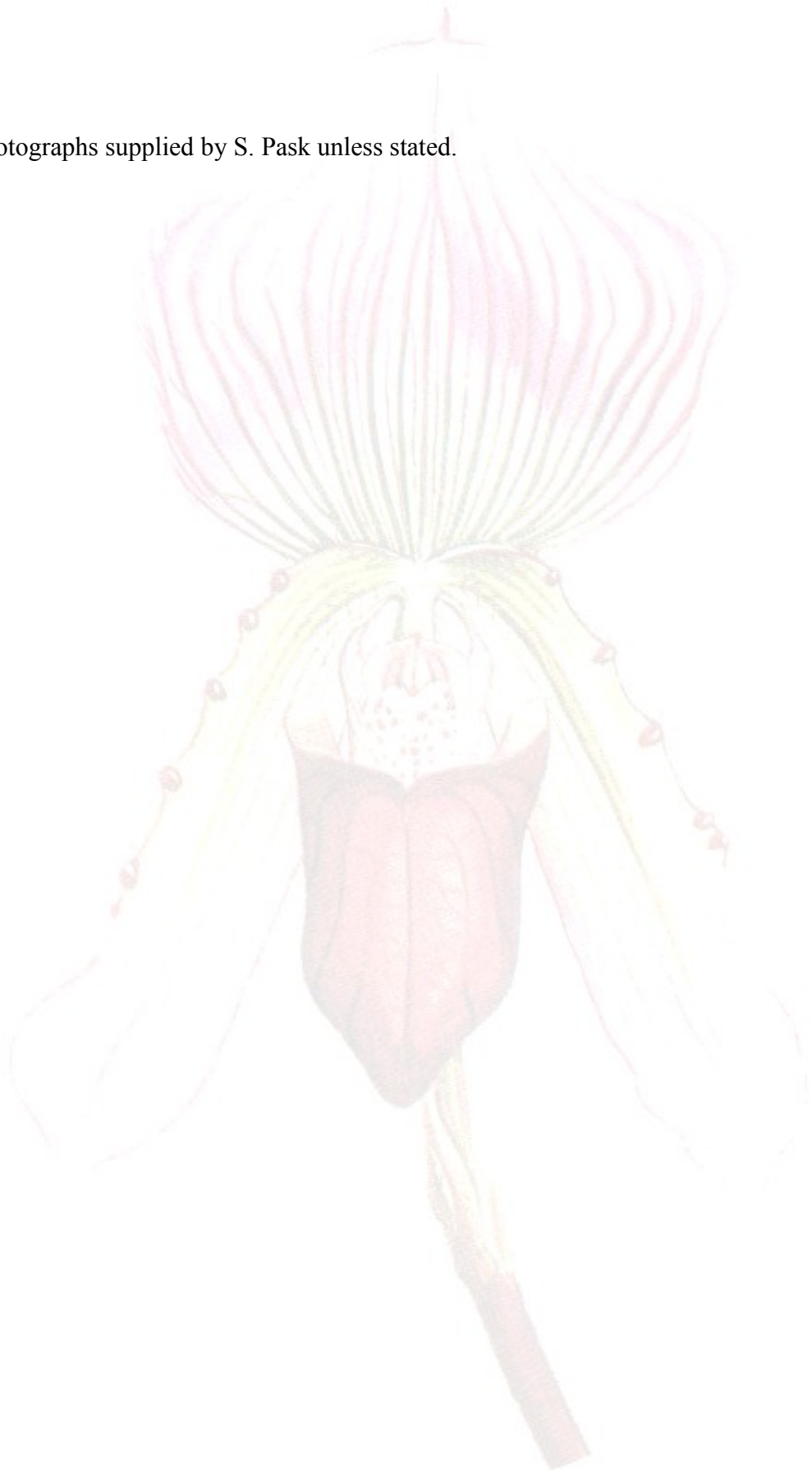
A Phragmipedium growth will only flower once. During the year's cycle, one or more new growths should form at the base of the mature growth. This will be next year's cycle. As these mature over the next year, the now previously flowered growth will slowly, leaf by leaf, die back. After a number of years, this process means that it may be possible to divide the plant into two or more separate plants, provided they all have new growth and root systems. Many people prefer to keep the growths together during re-potting, resulting in large, impressive specimens.

BOOKS:

Harold Koopowitz – Tropical Slipper Orchids ISBN 978-0-88192-864-8

Culture information taken from the Growers and Buyers Guide to Orchids in the UK – 2013 (Golden Guide).

Photographs supplied by S. Pask unless stated.



**East Midlands
Orchid Society**