Genus Comparettia

The genus Comparettia was named for Italian botanist Andrea Comparetti (1745-1801). The 78 species and 1 natural hybrid occur from Mexico through Central America to South America. Many species are concentrated in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. The members of Comparettia are epiphytes or lithophytes with short creeping rhizomes. The pseudobulbs are small with one leave at the apex. They produce basal, arching inflorescences that are simple or branched. The flowers are brightly colored with erect dorsal sepal and petals. The lateral sepals sweep back to form a sheath around twin nectar producing horns composed of the basal lobes of the lip. The lip is broadly fan shaped with a line of spots leading to the base.

The small pseudobulbs are flattened ovals or cylindrical, each bearing a large fleshy leaf. The inflorescences bear several to many downward nodding flowers.

The spur-like nectary evolved to attract long-tongued insects like butterflies. They display bright colors, have a large lip for landing and markings that serve as nectar guides. Several red-orange species from high elevations attract hummingbirds. A special tissue hump forces the hummingbird’s beak upward pressing the bird’s forehead against the column to effect pollination.