

Cattleya iricolor Rchb.f., Gard. Chron., n.s., 1874(2): 162 (1874).

SUBGENUS *Stellata* Withner 1988

Common Name: Rainbow Colored Cattleya



Synonyms

Cattleya iricolor f. *orlata*, *Cattleya iricolor* f. *alba*

Description

Found in Peru and Ecuador in the eastern Andes as an ascending, unifoliate epiphyte in wet montane forests, high up in tall tree branches at elevations of 400 to 1220 meters and is a rare, hot to cool growing, erect epiphytic species with clavate, slightly compressed pseudobulbs that become sulcate with age and carries a single, apical, narrowly oblong-elliptic or oblong, acute, conduplicate towards the base, coriaceous leaf that blooms in the late winter and spring on a terminal, erect, 2 1/2" [6.25 cm] long, few [6 to 10] flowered inflorescence arising from a conduplicate sheath on a newly emerging pseudobulb and is held at mid-leaf.³

The species is unifoliate and produces 2-3 creamy white or straw colored flowers 3 in. (8 cm.) in diameter. The sepals and petals are all long and narrow, and the lip is noticeably pointed and scarcely lobed. There is a red

veining in the throat, a band of shading ranging from yellow to white across the base of the midlobe, and then another band of radiating red- purple lines extending toward the apex. There are, incidentally, only two *Cattleya* species with definitely pointed lips, *iricolor* and *aurantiaca*. All the others have rounded or retuse midlobes, though *maxima*, *mooreana* and *amguaiensis* approach pointedness.

The plants are distinctive in that the leaves are long in proportion to the slender pseudobulbs, and are narrow and upright to 15—20 inches (35-45 cm.) and about 1 inch (2-3 cm.) wide. It is reported that selfed seedlings of the species are being raised in cultivation, and a few plants have been brought into cultivation from the wild. In 1893 one hybrid with *C. mossiae* was produced—*Cattleya Philo* with a variety 'Albiflora'—but no trace of them exists today. Yellow and pink forms were once described, but until several seedling plants are flowered and described and more observations made in nature, we shall know little more of this species. Let us hope the native environment will not be burned down before the field work is accomplished. This species is one of about ten that cannot be exported from Ecuador at present.²

Habitat

Bearing a somewhat fanciful name, this species was a “lost” *Cattleya* until rediscovered in the 1960's. It was originally described by Reichenbach f. in 1874, rediscovered by Padre Andretta of Cuenca, Ecuador, and then sent to a few growers by the late José Strobel in 1962. But no one knew exactly what it was. It was finally recognized again in the 1976 article by Bin Weinhold in the *Am. Orchid Soc. Bulletin*. The plants come from the vicinity of Puyo on the eastern side of the Andes in Ecuador and grow at 3100 ft.(1000 m.) where rainfall is high. They flower in April and May.²

Ecuador. Plants were originally discovered in about 1870 at an undisclosed site. The species was then lost to cultivation and not even mentioned in the literature from 1893 until 1969. In 1962 it was rediscovered in the eastern foothills of the Andes at 1500-3300 ft. (450-1000 m) growing on tall trees in valleys south of Puyo. The habitat, which extends about 31 mi. (50 km) north and south of Puyo, habitat has high year-round rainfall. Bergstrom (1989) reported finding a form of this species in northern Peru near Huánuco. He stated that this species also grows in abundance further south on the road from Tingo Maria through Divisoria at 3950-5600 ft. (1200-1700 m), although most plants were seen at 4900-5250 ft. (1500-1600 m). Plants grow on trees, usually within easy reach of the ground, in a region where the climate is moderate and the humidity very high.

However, Rolando (1990) indicated that the Peruvian variety of *Cattleya iricolor* is actually the recently described new species *Cattleya mooreana* Withner, Allison, and Guenard. -- Source: Charles Baker⁴

Awards

Org.	Award	Points	Genus	Name	Cultivar	Flwrs	Buds	Infl.	Avg.	P	Year
AOS	 CBM	81	C	iricolor	Kipbin	6		2	3.0		1972
AOS	 CCM	81	C	iricolor	Dr. Eduardo Sanchez	41	4	7	6.4		2008
AOS	 HCC	77	C	iricolor	Greg Scott	9		1	9.0		2008
AOS	 HCC	76	C	iricolor	Show Angel	6		2	3.0		2004
AOS	 HCC	79	C	iricolor	Moses 	11	3	3	4.7		2003
AOS	 HCC	77	C	iricolor	Todd's Fashion 	18		5	3.6		1996
AOS	 HCC	78	C	iricolor	Orchid Eros 	8	1	2	4.5		2013

F-1 Hybrids and Progeny

Cattleya iricolor has been hybridized 7 times since 1892. All of the crosses were primaries with *Cattleya* and one each with *Guarianthe* and *Rhyncholaelia*, None of them produced a second generation and only 1, *Cattleya My Special Angel*, got an award.



Cattleya My Special Angel ‘Carri’s Sample’HCC/AOS

Cattleya iricolor x *Cattleya lutiola*

Breeding Strengths and Weaknesses

This species does not have a long history of breeding because it was “lost” from the time of its description in 1874 to its rediscovery in 1962. *Cattleya iricolor* is unusual in that the petals and sepals are the same size and color and its lip is pointed. The small flower size and the thin, pale sepals and petals come through in the offspring and are a weakness. The lack of strong colors in the petals and sepals is a weakness. The colorful, pointed lip is strength as well as its intense fragrance. Flowers last only a couple of weeks which is another weakness. The fact that it can have as many as 10 flowers per spike is a strength.

Culture

Cattleya iricolor is an easy plant to grow and seems to adjust well to normal *Cattleya* greenhouse temperatures of 58 to 60 F (14 to 16 C) at night and 85 F (29 C) during the day. It needs lots of sun, moving air and normal greenhouse humidity and grows well in clay pots with a variety of standard *cattleya* mixes. I have found it to be a free-flowering plant that never fails to produce at least six flowers on a spike. If grown really well, *C. iricolor* can produce up to 10 flowers on a spike. *Cattleya iricolor* grows naturally in Ecuador and Peru where it is found at relatively high elevations around 3,000 to 4,000 feet (915 to 1,220 m) near the tops of tall trees.⁶

References

Aldridge, Peggy. 2008. *An Illustrated Dictionary of Orchid Genera.* Selby Botanical Garden Press.

Chadwick, A.A. 2004. *Cattleya iricolor: The Neighborhood's Cattleya.* Orchids: June

¹**la Croix, Isobyl. 2008.** *The New Encyclopedia of Orchids.* Timber Press

Meisel, Kaufmann, Pupulin 2014. *Orchids of Tropical America.* Cornell University Press

²**Withner, Carl L. 1988.** *The Cattleyas and Their Relatives: Volume I* Timber Press

³www.orchidspecies.com<http://apps.kew.org/wcsp/qsearch.do>

<https://secure.aos.org/aqplus/SearchAwards.aspx>

⁴OrchidWiz.Database X4.2

⁵Weinhold, Bin., 1976 *Cattleya iricolor: Its capture and cultivation.* *Bulletin.* :Vol 45, 288-290 & back cover

⁶<http://www.chadwickorchids.com/content/cattleya-iricolor>