

Orchids in Summer?

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When is orchid season? Springtime, you say? True, but many orchids can be found in summer too.

Austral Ladies Tresses is one such orchid. It was seen only a few weeks ago in a wetland near Hamilton. It was recognised by the way its small (6 mm), pink and white flowers were arranged in a spiral round the main stem. This plant is usually found in very damp places, often in water. Although it is widespread throughout Victoria, except in the north west, botanists think it is becoming rarer because of the loss of suitable habitat.

Leek orchids are a group (a genus) in which some species flower in summer in the wetlands of the Hamilton district. These plants are named not because they taste or smell like leeks but because the flower stem comes out of a single, cylindrical leaf just like a leek. One species, the Gorae Leek Orchid, is classified as endangered as it is known only from a few sites, all of them in south-west Victoria. Several new species of leek orchid have been discovered in recent years.

Hyacinth Orchids occur in at least three species that flower during summer in our area. These strikingly beautiful flowers resemble the northern hemisphere hyacinth both in colour and general shape. The flowers, in various shades of pink and white, are carried on tall, often brown stems. They can be found growing amongst bracken in eucalypt forests and are common along the Henty Highway around Heywood and in the Grampians.

Cinnamon Bells are also to be found in these places. A less appealing name for this orchid is Potato Orchid. Its white tipped, cinnamon coloured, bell-shaped flower, again on a spike, make it easy to identify. Like the Hyacinth Orchid, this species has no leaves and so cannot produce its own food. They depend on underground fungi which break down dead plant material in the soil to supply them with nutrients.

These are only some of the summer flowering orchids that grow in our district. They are worth looking out for.

Photos (below):

Cinnamon Bells (*Gastrodia sesamoides*) and Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium punctatum*)

