

An Extinct Species of Orchid now Rediscovered at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve

Yeoh Yi Shuen, our Year Six NUS High School Student, shares her reflections in being part of this amazing rediscovery

I was invited by Alex Yee from the Botany Lab (Advanced Research Programme Research Mentor and friend) to go on a field trip with some researchers at the Botany Lab at National University of Singapore (NUS), Dr Helena Duistermaat who was visiting from Leiden in the Netherlands and Chung Yi Fei, a Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (BTNR) project manager. The main purpose of the trip was to collect native forest sedges in BTNR for Dr Duistermaat's studies on the sedges in Singapore.

While searching for sedges, we chanced upon the small orchid which was growing on the ground in a more undisturbed area of forest. At first glance, we thought that



Figure 1 The single specimen of the once thought 'extinct' *Vrydagzynea lancifolia* orchid species—Photo: Reuben Lim

the plant was from the family Commelinaceae as it had certain superficially similar characteristics with other plants of that family. Seeking to confirm its identity, a plant was collected and subsequently sent to the SBG Herbarium to ascertain its identity. We did not expect to have

rediscovered a long-thought extinct orchid species; in fact, I was pleasantly surprised and only found out about it when Reuben Lim from the Botany Lab emailed us a first draft of the article. Several amendments were made to the draft and the paper was eventually published.

Rediscovering plants once thought 'extinct' in Singapore is always exciting and a great privilege, especially for amateur botany enthusiasts like me and is one of the factors that spurs us on in learning about the native flora. It makes me realize that even though Singapore's forest area is small, there is a lot to discover when we actually bother to look around the forests and investigate unfamiliar-looking plants. It is heartening to know that while many plants have become extinct due to

developmental pressures, the small reserves still contain long-lost treasures!
Hopefully more of such can be found.

For more reading, you may wish to access this link:

<http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/case-you-missed-it/story/extinct-orchid-resurfaces-bukit-timah-reserve-20140201>