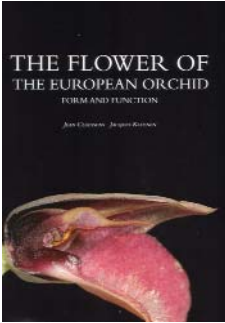


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Book Review: *The Flower of the European Orchid* Simon Tarrant



The Flower of the European Orchid - Form and Function
by Jean Claessens and Jacques Kleynen
Hardback, 440 pp. ISBN 978-90-9025556-9
Published by Jean Claessens and Jacques Kleynen
(www.europeanorchids.com)
Price €72.50 via the website

Many books on European orchids are field guides, and most of them fuel the debate between lumpers and splitters. This book uses a genus format and it is not intended for use in the field – rather, it is a celebration of the flowers of European orchids. As the authors developed an interest in the morphology of orchid flowers they focussed increasingly on pollination methods and pollinating insects. They have travelled throughout Europe to study and record orchids and their pollinators, and they have also made an extensive study of existing literature to further their knowledge and understanding of their chosen subject. Arguably, this book provides the most comprehensive account since Charles Darwin's ground-breaking "*On the Various Contrivances by Which Orchids are Pollinated by Insects*" and in the preface Richard Bateman describes it as "an unparalleled account of the floral structure and reproductive biology of the orchids of Europe and Asia Minor".

What sets this book apart, indeed its crowning glory, is the outstandingly superb photography, ranging from habitat shots to the use of microscopy to show incredible levels of detail. For every genus we are shown flower spikes, individual flowers and detailed close-ups of the component parts of the flower, with a special emphasis on the column and pollinia. I am particularly impressed by the stunning pictures of pollinating insects with pollinia attached to their bodies as they move from flower to flower (see coer photograph of this issue for an example). The photographs are accompanied by detailed text including general descriptions, morphological adaptations and observations about pollination. This is backed up by tables listing all pollinating insects recorded from the 1860s to 2011 by orchid species, proportion of fruit set, mechanisms of autogamy (self-fertilisation, but don't worry, they also provide a glossary), and a comprehensive bibliography.