

PREFACE

After the tremendous successes of the First Scientific Conference on Andean Orchids in Gualaceo and the Second Conference at Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, the organizers of the series received a bid from the Orchid Society of Quito, Botanical Garden of Quito, and Municipality of Quito to host the Third Conference and Show in February 2009 at the Itchimbia Cultural Center. Soon thereafter we received promises of additional sponsorship from the Ecuadorian Ministries of the Environment and Ministry of Tourism, the Botanical Foundation of the Andes, and the Catholic University of Quito. All these generous sponsors made it possible for us to invite 32 speakers from Ecuador, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, the United States and Puerto Rico, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, and Czech Republic. Lectures and poster sessions in orchid systematics, ecology, and conservation science spanned three days, February 5-7, 2009.

It is appropriate that we held the Conference in Ecuador in 2009, the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin (February 9, 2009) and the 150th anniversary of publication of his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of the Races in the Struggle for Life* (November 22, 1859). For it was largely because of his collections and observations of finches and mockingbirds in the Galapagos Islands that he became aware of morphological differences among them, differences that translated into recognition of different species on each of the islands in the archipelago and would later be adduced to support his theory of natural selection. The polymathic contributions of Charles Darwin are celebrated in this volume, some explicitly as in the papers by Ken Cameron (orchid pollination) and Stephen Kirby (geology and its relationship to orchid diversity in the Neotropics) but many others implicitly, whether they are papers devoted to systematics or ecology.

The variation in nature that serves as the raw materials for descent with modification is under assault around the world by rampant deforestation — especially in Ecuador and Brazil. Alex Hirtz addresses the problem in Ecuador, while Thomas Miranda and Philip Seaton discuss *in situ* and *ex situ* solutions, whether already in progress or proposed. As always, education is the underlying key to all the solutions, and it is in that context we hope this volume (and others in the series) will be consulted by present-day students and serve a purpose in the years ahead.

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