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The Orchids of Crete (Part 3): genus *Orchis*

(Cretan-, Italian-, Monkey-, Milky white-, Three-toothed-, Borys-, Lax-flowered Orchis)

(An article ^[1] from our forums member **Ralf Schwab**, Obertshausen [Hessen]).

So far we introduced 8 Orchid types with our leaflet series “The Orchids of Crete” (see info-leaflet **No. 269-08/E**, Part 1 and **No. 270-08/E**, Part 2); below we consider **seven** other species from the genus of *Orchis*.

The here assembled species have a red or at least reddish colour as common feature. For the first 5 species, the more or less split labium reminiscent of puppets or monkeys. If you see into in the bloom, you'll see also a grinning face in some species, formed by two eyes (pollen levels), the nose (stigma) and the wide mouth (spur socket). The last two types have an undivided labium.



The **Cretan Orchis** (*Orchis prisca*) is one, as its name suggests, occurring only in Crete orchid species which occurs even here just in a few places. Characteristic is the late flowering, the green colour in the Centre of the lateral sepals, the trilobite, and pink coloured and spotted in Central labium and the short spur. Earlier this type was expected to “Spitzels” Orchid (*Orchis spitzelii*), which has a wide range with large variability in southern Europe, in which it occurs only in a few localities. **Flowering season:** late April to late May. **Habitat:** light pine forest, bushy Garrigue, especially over debris flow and on basic surface above 800 m. **Plant find spot:** Thripti, south-east of Pahia Ammos / Prefecture Lassithi on the 21st of April 2007.



The **Italian Orchis** (*Orchis italica*) is wide spread on Crete and occurs in some areas in large populations. The dense, pink flower head appeals frayed through the long lappets of its flower labium. **Flowering season:** late March to late April. **Habitat:** meadow Garrigue, also in light pine forests and on basic surface up to 900 m. **Plant find spot:** west of Gerakari / Prefecture Rethymno on the 16th of April 2007 (left) and at Xiron close to Spili on the 25th of April 2007 (right)



The **Monkey Orchis** (*Orchis simia*) is similar the Italian Orchid, but has a multihead-inflorescence with a gracilized-looking flowers. While in most other Orchid types of Crete the flower begins down on the inflorescence, the topmost blossom opens first at the Monkey Orchis. The flower reminds, according to the species name, on a small monkey. **Flowering season:** late March to late April. **Habitat:** mainly terraced lawns, bushy Garrigue. On Crete in large herds only locally, usually on elevations between 600 and 800 m. **Plant find spot:** at Rodovani, north-east of Palaeochora / Prefecture Chania on the 18th of April 2007.



The **Milky white Orchis** (*Orchis lactea*) flowers as one of the earliest orchids of Crete in some places already in February. Characteristic are the green stripe in the closed helmet of the flower and the flower labium which reminds of a little doll with thick arms and legs. **Flowering season:** late February to early April. **Habitat:** grassier places in the Garrigue. On basic soil only, widely spread on Crete. **Plant find spot:** west of Gerakari/ Prefecture Rethymno on the 20th of March 2008.



Similar to the Milky white Orchis but much daintier in growth is the **Three-toothed Orchis** (*Orchis tridentata*), that blooms on the same places than the first kind but significantly later. The inflorescences have relatively few flowers, whose labium are frayed at the ends. **Flowering season:** mid April to mid May. **Habitat:** usually in protection of Garrigue bushes, on basic soil only, up and above of 1300m. **Plant find spot:** west of Gerakari/ Prefecture Rethymno on the 19th of April 2007 (left) and on the 16th of April 2007 (right).



The **Borys Orchis** (*Orchis boryi*) is similar to the Little Orchis widespread in Central Europe, but flowers as the Monkey Orchis from top to bottom. The labium is rounded with some darker, red violet spotting in the Middle, the sepals are green striped, and the leaves of usually low growing plants (20 cm) are unstained. **Flowering season:** April to May. **Habitat:** on the surface acidic areas of grassy-nature. **Plant find spot:** west of Gerakari/ Prefecture Rethymno on the 19th of April 2007 (left) and on the 20th of March 2008 (right).



The **Lax-flowered Orchis** (*Orchis laxiflora*) is similar to the Borys Orchis but is a slender plant which can reach heights of 50 cm. The inflorescence is loosely (name), usually dark red-violet coloured with bright labium Centre. **Flowering season:** early April to late April. **Habitat:** be dependent on wetlands; also in salt affected coastal areas, in open terrain and on basic soil. Anthropogenic influences lead to a reduction of this species on Crete. **Plant find spot:** west of Gerakari/ Prefecture Rethymno on the 19th of April 2007.

^[1]: with the co-operation of *Ute Kluge* and *Heinz Eikamp*

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[to be continued with Part 4]