

34. PAPHIOPEDILUM HELENAE

The hilly karst limestone country of south-west China and adjacent Vietnam is home to many species of slipper orchid. Its precipitous nature and inaccessibility until recent years has meant that the plant life of the region is still little explored. Only recently have botanists begun to collect in these areas and it is scarcely surprising that novelties still appear. One of the prettiest of these is *Paphiopedilum helenae* which was discovered in 1995 by Leonid Averyanov, N.T. Hiep and D.D. Huyen in the remote area in Cao Bang Province of Vietnam just south of the Chinese border. It is named in honour of Averyanov's wife.

This exciting discovery is closely allied to *P. barbigerum* with which the authors compared it. It differs in having rather broader subsucculent leaves, predominantly yellow flowers with a narrower white margin to the dorsal sepal, petals with straight rather than undulate margins, a somewhat more inflated lip, and a suborbicular staminode. These features, if consistent, are probably just sufficient to maintain *P. helenae* as distinct at specific rank, although investigation of further populations may link it more closely with *P. barbigerum*, an orchid found just to the north in Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces of China. Another photograph by Averyanov published in the Japanese journal *New Orchids* (80: p. 9) and here shows a plant with two growths that looks rather closer to *P. barbigerum* in the way it carries its petals.

Paphiopedilum helenae grows on lightly shaded or open vertical cliffs of north-facing aspect on karst limestone hills at between 850 and 900 m elevation. It grows with its roots in



Fig. 67 (above) & 68 (opposite). *Paphiopedilum helenae*. Vertical limestone bluffs, Cao Bang Prov., Vietnam. (Photo.: L.V. Averyanov)