

## PEDILUM SUKHAKULII

Few introductions of recent years have created a greater impact than *P. sukhakulii*, first seen in cultivation as late as 1964 but subsequently imported in such vast quantities that it has become one of the commonest species in cultivation.

The history of its discovery has been ably summarised by Schoser & Senghas (1965). It first appeared in Europe in an orchid nursery in Solingen, West Germany, in November 1964 in a consignment of *P. callosum* from Thailand. The source of this and other consignments was eventually traced to the Bangkrabue Nursery in Bangkok managed by Mr Prason Sukhakul. Sukhakul was able to provide an exact locality for the plants, Phu Luang Mountain in Loei Province of north-east Thailand. *P. sukhakulii* grows there terrestrially in sandy humus-rich loam, especially by streams in the shade of forest trees, on the upper slopes of the mountain almost up to the 1000 m summit. In the lower part of its range it grows with *P. callosum* which explains why it was originally found in an importation of that species. Sadly, this elegant orchid has suffered severely from the depredation of collectors so that now it is extremely rare in its only known locality and may indeed be verging on extinction there (Du Puy & Menzies, pers. comm).

*Paphiopedilum sukhakulii* is most closely allied to the *P. wardii* whose nearest locality is in the northernmost tip of Burma. Schoser & Senghas discussed in great detail the possibility that the Thai plants were the same as *P. wardii*. Apart from the great disjunction in distribution of some 1200 km they concluded that the Thai plants were distinct in several vegetative and floral features. Notably, their leaves lack any purple spotting underneath, the flowers are greener, and the dorsal sepal and synsepal are shorter and broader. Furthermore, the petals are



Fig. 122. *Paphiopedilum sukhakulii*, flowering in cultivation. (Photo.: D. Menzies)