



In memoriam: Eric Alston Christenson (1956–2011)

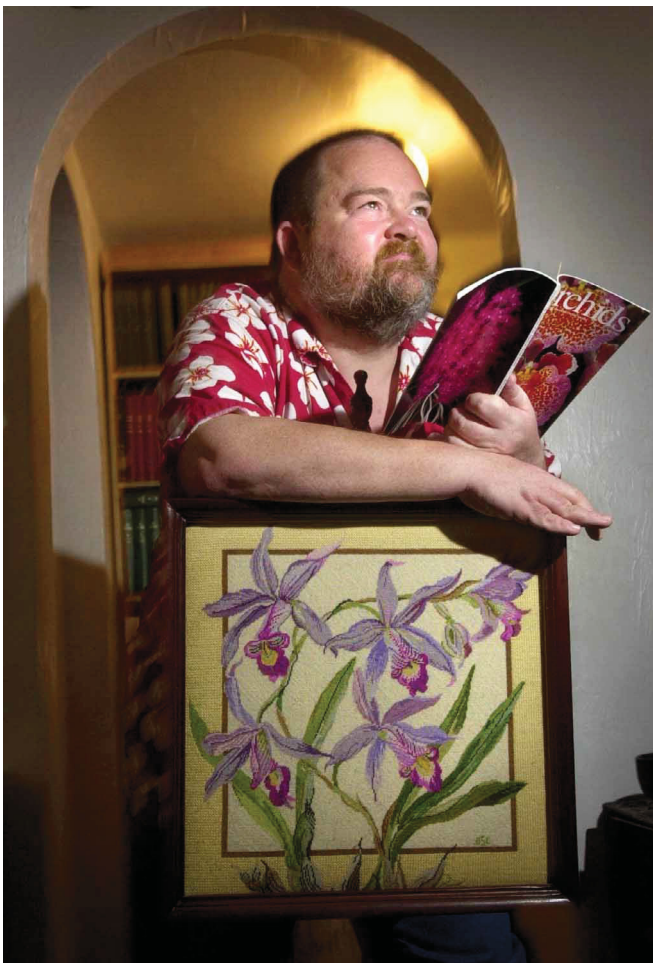
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Dr Eric Christenson was a well-known research taxonomist with a strong interest in orchids, floristics, nomenclature, conservation and horticultural taxonomy. He was a leading orchid expert who published numerous research papers in which he described hundreds of new species. His death is a great loss to the field of botany, which has lost one of its foremost experts on orchids. Eric died in April 2011 in his home in Bradenton, Florida.

Eric Christenson's monographic works focused mainly on Asian orchids, and he is probably best known for his monograph on the commonly cultivated genus *Phalaenopsis* (Christenson 2001). He travelled to numerous herbaria around the world to study original orchid collections, and he frequented South America, where his floristic works on orchids were focused. For instance, he authored the orchid treatment in the *Vascular Flora of Central French Guiana* (Mori *et al.* 1997) following fieldwork in the Guianas.

His long term collaboration with the late David Bennett in Peru resulted in the impressive 600 plates of the *Icones Orchidacearum Peruvianum* (Bennett & Christenson 1993–2001), in which numerous species were illustrated, many new records for Peru were listed and for which a great number of species

new to science were published. He additionally wrote a bilingual flora to the orchids of Machu Picchu (Christenson 2003).

Eric's research articles often bridged the gap between taxonomy and horticulture. He applied his extensive knowledge of horticultural and taxonomic literature to provide stable names for orchid enthusiasts. He worked closely together with orchid growers to establish ex-situ propagation programmes for conservation of rare species, working actively with commercial growers and botanical gardens to that end.

His studies often focused on widespread species complexes and species thought to be highly variable, to come to a more detailed definition of taxa and their distribution. This aided in many cases the identification of rare species and resulted in the redefining of conservation strategies in Latin America.

He was immediately enthusiastic about the philosophy behind *Phytotaxa*, he joined as a subject editor, and the first article published in *Phytotaxa* was one authored by him (Bennett & Christenson 2009). Eric was a prolific author, producing in his lifetime over 300 publications.

Eric was larger than life, and most will remember him as intelligent and witty, recalling numerous small facts and anecdotes at just the right moment. He will be missed by his family, friends and the orchid community.

References

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