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# A nomenclatural history for *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* (Orchidaceae)

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## Abstract

The nomenclatural history of the naturally occurring hybrid orchid *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* (F.M.Bailey) F.M.Bailey is reviewed. The earliest published name for this hybrid was *D. speciosum* var. *delicatum* F.M.Bailey in 1883. In 1896, an artificially raised plant of *D. speciosum* × *D. kingianum* was granted an Award of Merit by the Royal Horticultural Society. Reports of this award in Horticultural periodicals that year were associated with publication of several names for the hybrid plants that only partially fulfilled the requirements of the *International Code of Nomenclature for plants, algae, and fungi* (ICN) and the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (ICNCP). None, however, achieved valid publication or establishment under the respective codes, leaving *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* (F.M.Bailey) F.M.Bailey as the earliest available name at species rank for the naturally occurring hybrid, contrary to recently published arguments that *D. speciokingianum* is the 'correct' name for both nothospecies and grex. The provisions of both ICN and ICNCP are discussed with reference to published names. The earliest name established for the grex is either D. Kingiano-speciosum or *D.* × *spyersii*. There seems nothing to be gained in having two names in Latin form for the same hybrid, when differences in origin can be reflected by typographical modification of the nothospecies epithet, as is current established practice.

## Introduction

A naturally occurring hybrid between *Dendrobium kingianum* Bidwill ex Lindl. and *D. speciosum* Sm. occurs sporadically along the south-east coast of Australia. This natural hybrid is patchily distributed, coincident with where the two parental species grow in close proximity. While the hybrid is generally uncommon, Alum Mountain near Bulahdelah and Spring Bluff near Toowoomba are celebrated localities where, even today, natural hybrids may be observed in the wild.

Like all *Dendrobium* sect. *Dendrocoryne* from south-east Australia, the hybrids between *D. kingianum* and *D. speciosum* attracted early attention from orchid taxonomists and orchid growers in nearly equal measure, both within Australia and overseas in England, to where plants were sent for cultivation by orchid enthusiasts.

This nomenclatural history is presented in two parts to reflect contributions to the naming of the hybrid from these different sources, scientific on the one hand and horticultural on the other. This subdivision also reflects the fact that names for hybrids are potentially, and in many cases actually, governed by two complementary

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International Codes of Nomenclature, the *International Code of Nomenclature for plants, algae and fungi* (Turland et al. 2018) for wild plants on the one hand, and the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (Brickell et al. 2016) for cultivated plants on the other. Throughout this review, these codes are referred to as the ICN and ICNCP, respectively. The scientific contributions to naming of the natural hybrids made under the ICN are described first, followed by the horticultural contributions to naming artificial hybrids under the ICNCP. The two codes have different spheres of responsibility, but these spheres may intersect and overlap, and the resulting interactions have implications for our interpretation of nomenclatural acts. The spheres of influence and division of responsibilities of each code, their respective requirements for publication of names, and the interaction between the two codes with respect to naturally occurring hybrids are discussed at the end of this review, following the summary histories provided for nomenclatural acts under each code.

## The botanical naming history

Frederick Manson Bailey was the first to propose formal taxonomic recognition of the natural hybrid between *Dendrobium kingianum* and *D. speciosum* when he published the variety *Dendrobium speciosum* var. *delicatum* F.M.Bailey. From the very start, the nomenclatural history associated with the plants that I will call *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* (F.M.Bailey) F.M.Bailey throughout this article, in conformity with common usage, was fraught by misadventure.

Bailey had intended to publish *D. speciosum* var. *delicatum* in the first volume of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, but the attention garnered by the fact that Queensland had a Royal Society was such that a detailed summary of the Society's first meeting was published in *The Brisbane Courier Mail* in the newspaper printed on the 1 September 1883. The account of Dr Bailey's talk to the Society's inaugural meeting (Anonymous 1883) was sufficiently detailed that it fulfilled the requirements for effective and valid publication under the *International Code of Nomenclature* (Turland et al. 2018). Bailey (1884) was understandably embarrassed by this situation, even though it is by no means unique among Australian orchids, *Dendrobium fairfaxii* F.Muell. & Fitzg. had earlier been published in *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* in 1872. Bailey's epithet *delicatum* referred to the labellum, which was 'of a very delicate texture, white speckled with purple, the middle lobe apiculate' (Bailey 1884: 11), features that in most cases distinguish *D.* × *delicatum* from both parents. The plants described by Bailey were gathered by Benjamin Crow and Carl Hartmann on the 'Main Range' inland from Brisbane, at a locality thought to be Spring Bluff (Overall 1963). Wild collected plants from Spring Bluff are still widely cultivated (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Flowers of a naturally occurring *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* from Spring Bluff, Queensland, in cultivation. Plant cultivated and photographed by M. Renner.

Bailey (1902) elevated his variety to species rank in the fifth volume of the *Queensland Flora*, there accepting the taxon as a species, rather than as having a hybrid origin.

Until the late 1920's, natural occurrences of *D.* × *delicatum* were associated with ranges in south-eastern Queensland, but in 1930, plants distinct from, but growing with, *D. kingianum* and *D. speciosum* at Alum Mountain, near Bulahdelah were sent to Herman Montague Rucker Rupp by Kesteven. Rupp (1931) described these plants from Alum Mountain as *Dendrobium kestevenii* Rupp. and noted the plants' affinities to both *D. speciosum* and *D. kingianum*, and also postulated a possible a hybrid origin for his "species".

Rupp (1944) described in *D. kestevenii* a new variety, *D. kestevenii* var. *coloratum* Rupp, based on a plant cultivated at Bulahdelah, so reaffirming his view that *D. delicatum* and *D. kestevenii* warranted recognition as separate species.

However, a hybrid origin for *D.* × *delicatum* was regarded as a near certainty by Rupp and Hunt (1948), who were 'practically certain that the origin of *D. delicatum* lies in natural hybridization between *D. speciosum* and *D. kingianum*'. Rupp and Hunt (1948) present Australian botanists as previously skeptical of evidence from experimental crossings of *D. speciosum* and *D. kingianum* in England, suspecting that English botanists were confusing the white-flowering form of *D. kingianum* with *D. delicatum*. There are grounds for this concern, given the *D. kingianum* var. *album* described and illustrated by Williams (1888) was a plant having inflorescences a foot long, and bearing 20 flowers whose segments were longer and narrower than in *D. kingianum*. *Dendrobium kingianum* has at most 15 flowers per raceme (Adams et al. 2021), and broadly triangular lateral sepals whose ventral margin is not, or scarcely inclined below the horizontal, such that the tips of the lateral sepals, the labellum midlobe, and the base of the mentum are arranged more or less at the same level across the bottom of the flower when viewed from the front. The illustration of *D. kingianum* var. *album* B.S.Williams presented by Williams (1888) shows a plant whose lateral sepals are triangular-falcate, and whose apices extend well below the tip of the labellum and mentum when viewed from the front, in a manner consistent with *D.* × *delicatum* due to the influence on flower shape coming from *D. speciosum*. The flower shape and flower count per inflorescence of *D. kingianum* var. *album* are more compatible with *D.* × *delicatum,* this view of its affinities was held by Dockrill (1993) and Adams and Lawson (1995) and is confirmed here. The illustration is the only known extant element of original material of *D. kingianum* var. *album* and is therefore designated as the lectotype of this variety below (ICN Art 9.3, 9.4). Experimental crosses between the putative parents were repeated in Australia by Dr H.E. Young of Brisbane (Rupp and Hunt 1948), the resulting plants being indistinguishable from natural *D.* × *delicatum,* and the matter was more or less settled. Rupp and Hunt (1948) also begrudgingly conceded that *D. delicatum* and *D. kestevenii* likely had the same hybrid parentage.

Debate about the status of these two taxa continued into the 1960's, when a consensus view emerged that both taxa represented sporadic hybrids between *D. kingianum* and two varieties of *D. speciosum*, *D. speciosum* var. *hillii* Mast. in the case of *D. delicatum* and *D. speciosum* var. *speciosum* in the case of *D. kestevenii* (Blombery 1965; Kirkland 1967; Overall 1963, 1969; Clemesha 1970).

That consensus view endured for nearly two decades, until a proposal to elevate the varieties then recognised within *Dendrobium speciosum* to species rank was published by Clements (1989). Recognition of *Dendrobium speciosum* var. *hillii* as *Dendrobium tarberi* M.A.Clem. created an opening for the recognition of both *D.* × *delicatum* and *D.* × *kestevenii* because under the concepts of Clements (1989), the two entities then represented progeny from hybridisation events involving two different sets of parental species. However, despite the persistence of proposals to recognise the myriad of morphotypes within *Dendrobium speciosum* as distinct species (e.g. Jones 2021), empirical data from both morphological and molecular sources gathered to date support a broad circumscription for *D. speciosum*, reflecting the clinal pattern of morphological variation across this geographic distribution (Adams et al. 2006), and patterns of genetic substructure and admixture (Simpson et al. 2018). This justifiably broad circumscription of *D. speciosum* condemns *D.* × *kestevenii* to synonymy of *D.* × *delicatum*. Or so we thought, because there seems to be an embedded nomenclatural issue arising when we consider horticultural contributions to nomenclature, as have been raised by Shaw (2014), among others.

## The horticultural naming history

The first flowering of an artificial hybrid between *Dendrobium kingianum* and *D. speciosum* was announced in The *Gardners' Chronicle*, a weekly periodical, published on 26 March 1892, wherein it was stated that 'Sir Trevor Lawrence, Bart. MP., Barford Lodge, staged plants of *Dendrobium speciosum* (pod) × *D. kingianum*, which had small white flowers' (Anonymous 1892). Though the hybrid combination was stated, no name was proposed for the hybrid plants in this article. The absence of a name for the grex means that no grex name was proposed, and none was established in this publication (ICNCP Art. 27.3 was fulfilled, but Art. 27.1 and Art. 23.1 were not).

Four years later, Lawrence's hybrid received an Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society, which garnered mention in several articles published in 1896. The first of these was in The *Gardners' Chronicle* of 12 March 1896, where the name *Dendrobium* specio-Kingianum was used for the hybrid, but no statement of the hybrid combination was provided (Anonymous 1896a). The grex name was therefore not formally established in this article either.

On 14 March 1896, *Dendrobium* specio-Kingianum was mentioned in *The Garden* (Anonymous 1896c), with a brief description of inflorescence habit and flower colour, but no statement of parentage. The lack of a statement of the hybrid's parentage in this article, in terms of the hybrid combination, meant the requirements for establishment under the ICNCP were not fulfilled.

However, the form of the name, and its publication with a description of the plant, albeit a brief description, at face value appears to have inadvertently fulfilled the requirements of the ICN for the valid publication of a species name, a point to which we will return.

The next mention of the hybrid was in *The Orchid Review* Volume IV, No. 40, dated April 1896, on page 107, where, under 'The Hybridist' segment *Dendrobium* × *Kingiano-speciosum* was given as the hybrid's name, and the parents stated as being '*D. speciosum* (pod) and *D. kingianum* (pollen), of which a good plant was exhibited at the Royal Horticultural Societies meeting on March 10th last' (Anonymous 1896b). The provision of a name for the grex, and the statement of the hybrid combination, fulfils the requirements for establishment of the grex name *D.* Kingiano-speciosum for this hybrid. It seems that this was the first time the requirements for establishment of a grex were fulfilled. The exact date of publication of *The Orchid Review* Volume IV No. 40 is not stated, but *The Orchid Review* was a self-described 'Illustrated Monthly Journal' whose April 1896 issue opens with notes stating 'Two meetings of the Royal Horticultural Society will be held during April, on the 7th and 21st respectively, when the Orchid Committee will meet at the usual hour of 12 o'clock, noon'. From this we can conclude that the April volume was published and distributed to subscribers in sufficient time for that information to be of use, most probably at the end of March or early in April.

The next mention of Lawrence's hybrid was in the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* Volume XX of 1896–97, in the Extracts from the Proceedings of the Royal Horticultural Society (Anonymous 1896d), where the granting of an Award of Merit to '*Dendrobium* × *Specio-Kingianum* (*D. speciosum* × *D. kingianum*) (votes unanimous), from Sir Trevor Lawrence, Bart. Burford, Dorking (gr. Mr. W.H. White)' was reported. The statement of a grex name and the hybrid combination fulfil the requirements for establishing the grex name. The date of publication of Volume XX is not stated, but the volume includes a report on the Temple Show held on 19, 20 and 21 May 1896. Also recorded are attendance and topic of talk for the general meeting held on 23 June 1896, minutes from the meeting of the Scientific Committee on the same date, and awards recommended by the Fruit and Vegetable Committee at Chiswick on 29 June 1896. These were all included in the extracts from the Proceedings of the Royal Horticultural Society in a sequentially numbered appendix whose meetings and shows are not chronologically arranged. On this evidence it is reasonable to conclude that Volume XX was published as single product, and it was published in the second half of 1896. This is the first time the requirements for establishment of the grex name *D.* Specio-kingianum were met, and the evidence suggests the establishment of that name post-dates the establishment of *D.* Kingiano-speciosum.

Thirteen years later, another name was proposed for Lawrence's hybrid, when *Dendrobium* × *spyersii* was listed in *The Orchid Stud-book* (Rolfe and Hurst 1909: 12, 13, 81) as the name for progeny of the crossing between *D. kingianum* and *D. speciosum*. Rolfe and Hurst (1909) seem to have been the first to publish the name *Dendrobium* × *spyersii* for the hybrid, even though they attributed the name to Lawrence in a publication of 1892. It is possible they refer to the first published mention of the hybrid, being the notice of first flowering published in *The Gardners' Chronicle* (Anonymous 1892), but only the hybrid combination was published there, and no grex name was proposed. Missing from the list of synonyms of *D.* × *spyersii* is D. Specio-Kingianum, *J. Roy. Hort. Soc. London* XX: ciii–civ (1896).

The next relevant mention in horticultural literature was eight decades later, when the *Handbook of Orchid Nomenclature and Registration* (1993) took the view that *D. speciokingianum* had been validly published and had priority over *D.* × *delicatum* as the name for both nothospecies and hybrid. Shaw (2014) also emphasized priority of the name *D. speciokingianum* in a nomenclatural note in the *Quarterly Supplement to the International Register and Checklist of orchid hybrids*. Shaw (2014) argued *Dendrobium speciokingianum* was the earliest available name at species rank for the naturally occurring hybrid between *D. kingianum* and *D. speciosum*, even though it is not the earliest published name. Because names only have priority in the rank at which they were proposed or combined, at varietal rank *D. speciosum* var. *delicatum* has priority, but at species rank *D. speciokingianum* has priority.

Capell (2024) took Shaw's (2014) interpretation a step further, asserting that not only was *D.* × *speciokingianum* the correct name for the natural hybrid, it was also, as *D.* Speciokingianum, the correct name for the artificial hybrid. These assertions have not been satisfactorily addressed.

## Discussion

At face value, there appears to be some merit to arguments made in favour of accepting *D. speciokingianum* as the correct name for *D.* × *delicatum* in terms of its earlier publication date at species rank, given that the requirements for effective and valid, if inadvertent, publication appear to have been fulfilled in 1896, in *The Garden* (Anonymous 1896c). At that time, it was permissible for descriptions to be in English, and there was no requirement to designate a type specimen, or even indicate a country of origin. In *The Gardners' Chronicle*, *Dendrobium specio-Kingianum* was published with a species name combining the epithets of the two parents in hyphenated form, with the termination of the *Kingianum* epithet unaltered. The named plant was known to be a hybrid, as avowed in the combination of the two parental epithets to form the hybrid's name. Constructions of this form, however, are considered to be formulae rather than epithets, as defined by the ICN Article H.10.2. The ICN provides guidance on the interpretation of Art. H.10.2 in Example 3, the case of *Verbascum nigro-lychnitis* (Schiede, *Pl. Hybr.*: 40, 1825), which is considered to be a formula meaning the correct binary name for the hybrid between *V. lychnitis* L. and *V. nigrum* L.; is *V.* × *schiedeanum* W.D.J.Koch (*Syn. Fl. Germ. Helv.*, ed. 2: 592, 1844). *Dendrobium specio-Kingianum* shares with *V. nigro-lychnitis* the formulaic construction based on the two parental epithets, one of which is unaltered, meaning the correct interpretation of *D. specio-Kingianum* is, like *V. nigro-lychnitis*, that it is not an epithet, and therefore is not a published name, and can be neither valid nor invalid as such. Because it is not a published name, it cannot exert priority at species rank over names subsequently published at that rank. The argument that *Dendrobium specio-Kingianum* was inadvertently proposed for a *species*, rather than a *nothospecies* (a plant of hybrid origin), has little merit. Knowledge of the plant's hybrid origin is avowed in the name proposed for the plant. The other publications including this hybrid also used a name derived from the epithets of the two parents combined with a hyphen, either *D.* Kingiano-speciosum or *D.* Specio-kingianum, and in all cases these publications failed to establish *epithets* for the nothospecies. The absence of the name *D.* × *speciokingianum* from Clements' (1989) *Checklist of*

*Australian Orchids* can then be explained by the fact that it is no name at all. Assertions that *D.* × *speciokingianum*, or any other name that is defined as a formula under the ICN, are the earliest validly published name for the nothospecies *D.* × *delicatum* are therefore incorrect.

The earliest validly published name for the nothospecies at species rank is *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* (as *D. delicatum* when published in 1902), because names can be moved between the species and nothospecies categories without changing date of publication or authorship (ICN Art. 50.1).

The nothovariety *D.* × *speciokingianum* var. *delicatum* (F.M.Bailey) R.Govaerts & J.M.H. Shaw (Shaw 2014 p. 36) is invalid, because the species name is not available for the formation of infraspecific taxa (Art. 35.1). Regardless of this invalidity, the variety of *D. speciosum* used as the parent of Lawrence's hybrid remains an open question, as does the identity of the so-called *D. kingianum* used which, if *D. kingianum var. album* was used, may have been a *D.* × *delicatum*.

There has also been confusion surrounding the establishment of the grex name for the hybrid between *D. speciosum* and *D. kingianum* when raised artificially. Capell (2024) stated that it was clear the name for the grex resulting the cross of *D. kingianum* and *D. speciosum* was *D.* Specio-kingianum. However, when the grex names of hybrids are in Latin form, the ICNCP seems to defer governance of the form of those names to the ICN (ICNCP Principle 2). This means that the same Art. H.10.2 could then apply to all the intended grex names based on a hyphenated combination of the parental species epithets. If these are then to be regarded as formulae, not names, the earliest grex name for the artificial hybrid established in accordance with the ICNCP and ICN in Latin form appears to be *Dendrobium* × *spyersii*, published in *The Orchid Stud-book* (Rolfe and Hurst 1909). If we accept that other grex names proposed based on Latinised species names are not of Latin form and are then permissible because they do not fall under the orthographic jurisdiction of the ICN, then the earliest established grex name appears to be *D.* Kingiano-speciosum. However, whether such names are acceptable as non-Latinised is unclear, and this is not an issue pursued further here.

Neither of these candidate grex names have been applied to cultivated plants of horticultural origin, which have been consistently referred to as *Dendrobium* Delicatum or *D.* × *delicatum* since the 1960's, when the issues surrounding hybrid origin, circumscription, and priority among competing names was resolved. A grex may share with a nothospecies the nothospecies' epithet when they have the same parentage, the grex name being distinguished by having an upper case first letter, and regular font, not italics. The relevant note of the ICNCP uses the word 'established', meaning that to be established as a grex name, the nothospecies epithet must be restated in conjunction with the names of both parents, if this was not done when the nothospecies was published. Registration is not a requirement of grex name establishment, rather it is a mechanism to avoid proposing the same name for a different grex.

This is not the first time that issues of priority have arisen in the naming of one of Australia's naturally occurring hybrid *Dendrobium* (or more precisely, in the application of names).

An earlier name, *Dendrobium* × *nitidum,* was recently found for the plant we know as *Dendrobium* × *gracillimum*. The *International Code of Nomenclature* has *priority* of names as a guiding principle, but also has mechanisms to avoid replacing well-established names simply because an earlier name is found, promoting the *stability* of names. Even if an earlier name for *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* existed, there would be considerable merit in conserving this well-established and long-used name for this familiar and horticulturally significant hybrid, just as there was for *D.* × *gracillimum* (Renner 2020). However, *D.* × *delicatum* is the earliest validly published nothospecies name, and conservation against an earlier name is not required. Similar conservation mechanisms exist under the ICNCP (Art. 11.7) and could be applied in the case of *D.* Delicatum against *D.* × *spyersii* or *D.* Kingiano-speciosum (if the latter is acceptable as a name). There seems little to be gained by having two names in Latin form for the same hybrid, when differences in origin can be reflected by typographical modification of the nothospecies epithet, as is current established practice.

## Taxonomic Treatment

***Dendrobium* × *delicatum*** (F.M.Bailey) F.M.Bailey, *The Queensland Flora* 5: 1527 (1902).

Basionym: *Dendrobium speciosum* var. *delicatum* F.M.Bailey, *The Brisbane Courier* 38(8000): 10 (1883).

≡ *Tropilis* × *delicata* (F.M.Bailey) Butzin, *Willdenowia* 12: 251 (1982).

≡ *Thelychiton* × *delicatus* (F.M.Bailey) M.A.Clem. & D.L.Jones, *The Orchadian* 13: 491 (2002).

≡ *Dendrobium* × *speciokingianum* nothovar. *delicatum* (F.M.Bailey) R.Govaerts & J.M.H.Shaw, *The Orchid Review* 122: 36 (2014), *nom. inval.* (ICN Art. 35.1).

Original material: 'Main Range. Collected by B. Crow and C.H. Hartmann'.

= *Dendrobium kingianum* var. *album* B.S.Williams, *The Orchid Album* 7: 322 (1888).

Original material: 'Native of Australia.... For the opportunity of figuring this rare plant we are indebted to A.H. Smee Esq., The Grange, Carabalton, in whose well-known collection the plant bloomed in the early part of the present year'.

Lectotype (here designated) [illustration]: *The Orchid Album* 7: Plate 332.

= *Dendrobium* × *spyersii* Lawrence ex Rolfe and Hurst, *The Orchid Stud-book* 81 (1909), *nom. inval.* (ICN Art. 38.1).

Original material: not stated.

= *Dendrobium* × *delicatum* var. *kestevenii* (Rupp) Leaney, *Australian Plants* 1: 19 (1960).

= *Dendrobium* × *kestevenii* Rupp, *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* 56(2): 137 (1931).

Original material: 'This very beautiful orchid was set to me in September, 1930, by Dr. H.L. Kesteven of Bullahdelah, whose sons had discovered it on the rocks of the easter side of the Alum Mountain.'

= *Dendrobium kestevenii* var. *coloratum* Rupp, *The Orchids of New South Wales* 144 (1944).

Original material: 'Northbridge (cult. from plant originally from Bullahdelah, Fieldsend, 9.1936), 1943, Rupp 9'.

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