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# Studies on orchid pollination

Research and understanding on breeding aspects of species still at their infancy, says expert

**ZORA CHAN**

**KUCHING:** More studies need to be done on orchid pollination to contribute towards the conservation of the plants and their pollinators.

A Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) research officer, Ong Poh Teck, said this was because not all orchids could self-pollinate.

He said in the wild orchids relied on insects for reproduction.

"Peninsular Malaysia is home to more than 900 native orchid species in 143 genera but studies on their pollination are still at their infancy with between 40 and 50 species already studied.

"From these preliminary studies, more than 40 species were visited and/or pollinated by various bees and flies.

"These ex-situ observations are supported by photographic and video evidence," he said at a public talk on the pollination of some

Peninsular Malaysian orchids at Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) here yesterday.

SBC held the talk as part of its public biodiversity-biotechnology appreciation and awareness programme.

Ong said the studies showed that there were six orchid species being pollinated by bees and they comprised *Cymbidium finlaysonianum*, *Dendrobium crumenatum*, *Dendrobium leonis*, *Eria densa*, *Thrixspermum trichoglottis* and *Tuberolabium rhopalorrhachis*.

He explained that pollination occurred when these bees visited flowers in search of nectar.

"However, not all visiting bees are pollinators. Some are 'robbers' — those which collect pollen for food," he said.

Ong said the Peninsular Malaysian

*Bulbophyllum* orchids consisted of more than 120 species — the largest orchid genus in the country and primarily pollinated by flies.

To date, he said 30 *Bulbophyllum* observed were visited and pollinated by various flies including fruit and carrion flies.

Ong has been interested in orchid cultivation as a child. At FRIM, Ong is responsible for maintaining the scientific living collection of orchids.

His fields of research include orchid taxonomy of Peninsular Malaysian orchids and pollination biology of local orchid species.

He has published descriptions of several new species and new records for Peninsular Malaysia and his observations on insect pollination.

He is the lead author of "*Wild Orchids of Peninsular Malaysia*", which features many of his photographs.

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**Going 'wild':**  
 Ong holding up his latest book, 'Wild Orchids of Peninsular Malaysia', co-written with Saw Leng Guan, Wendy Yong Sze Yee and Peter O'Byrne.