

A Further Look at *Pterostylis barbata* Lindley and *Pterostylis plumosa* Cady  
— and Six Other Possible "Bird Orchids" in Western Australia

by Ron L. Heberle

Peter Vaughan's article in *The Orchadian* of December 1979 and Andrew Brown's follow-up in the June 1980 issue highlight some stimulating and interesting information on this highly specialised group. Both writers seem to agree that the two discussed are the sole representatives, although Andrew suggests there could be a hybrid in Western Australia. Both quote Alex George and Leo Cady to support this viewpoint, although Alex George has some reservations and suggests that some further research is necessary. How very true.



Figure 1: *Pterostylis turfosa* or *P. barbata*?  
(flowers August-September).



Figure 2: *Pterostylis barbata* -ex Marambene  
(flowers August-September).

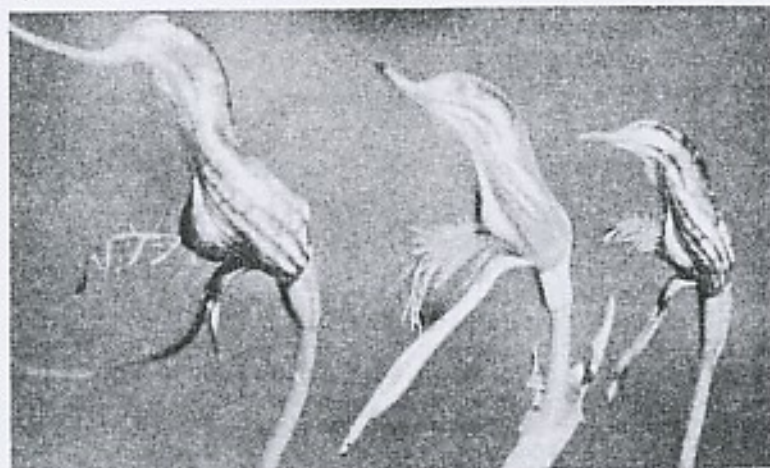


Figure 3: Three *Pterostylis* spp. (?)  
From left: (1) ex Rocky Gully (Sept-Oct), (2) ex Young's Siding (Sept-Oct) — possibly *P. plumosa*?  
(3) ex Esperance (Aug-Sept).

In the *W.A. Naturalist*, 1961, A.S. George discussed *P. turfosa* and *P. barbata* and suggested that the only difference between the two is the length of the filiform points and reduced *P. turfosa* to a synonym of *P. barbata* as Lindley's name predates Endlicher's and suggests that both the W.A. and the Eastern States species are one and the same, unless further studies reveal substantial differences.

In 1969 Leo Cady named *P. plumosa* so we then had two distinct and different species. In 1971, in *Muytsia* Vol. 1, No. 2 A.S. George suggests that specimens from Young's Siding, W.A. are similar to Cady's *plumosa*, so we are left with *P. barbata* and possibly *plumosa* in W.A. and *plumosa* in the East.

During 1977 Herb Foots, Foundation President of the W.A. Native Orchid Study and Conservation Group (then the W.A. Native Orchid Society), visited us at Albany and pointed out that the Albany "Bird Orchids" were markedly different from the *P. barbata* that grows in abundance near his home at the foot of the Darling Ranges near Perth. In 1979 I took specimens collected near our home in Spencer Park, Albany to the W.A. Herbarium where A.S. George confirmed their first recording.

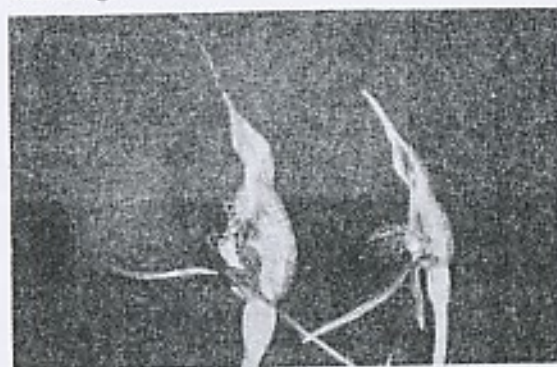


Figure 4: Two *Pterostylis* spp from Manjimup (flowering November-December).

Andrew Brown stated in his article in *The Orchadian* that *P. barbata* grew at Albany. I have never seen it within 150 kms of here; nor have I ever recognized a hybrid and have never collected at Busselton.

In August 1840, Ludwig Preiss collected a *Pterostylis* in Stirling Terrace, Albany, right in the town. It was subsequently named *P. turfosa* by Endlicher in 1946. This is the orchid that flowers all around Albany and up to 60 km east and west and 50 km inland in August and September. It would seem that there is a strong possibility that the Albany "bird" is in fact *P. turfosa*; so we could have at least three in the west.

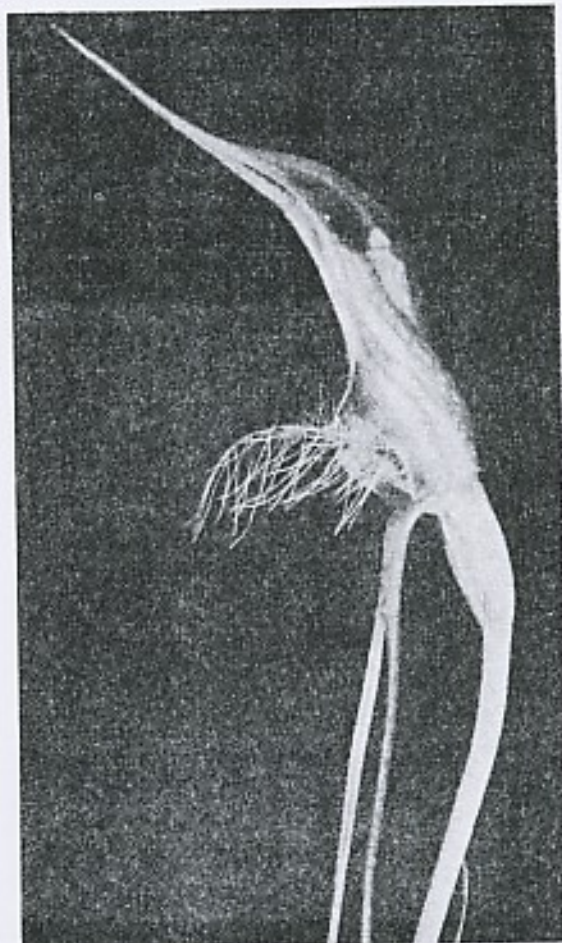


Figure 5: *Pterostylis* sp. — Tor Bay (flowers October–November).

As I have stated in the title: "and six other possible 'bird orchids' " I still have to account for the remaining five. I admit having great difficulties in discussing unnamed and undescribed orchids. I therefore submit photographs that will speak for themselves. Western Australia is a very big State; we still have approximately 15,000,000 hectares of bush in the South West; no more than 1% has been looked at by eyes that can identify what they see.

To conclude: in offering the results of 20 years or more of field experience, no single person can speak with authority. There will be many "birds" still to be found.

78 Campbell Road,  
ALBANY, 6330, W.A.

All photographs by R.L. Heberle.