

Conserving El Cielo orchids



WildShare International is working to protect Mexican orchids such as *Euchile mariae* (top), *Stanhopea tigrina* (above left) and *Laelia speciosa* (above right)

Efforts to raise awareness of the plight of Mexico's orchid populations have received funding from plant conservation charity Orchid Conservation International (OCI).

The OCI grant has been given to not-for-profit conservation group WildShare International to continue its work with the local citizens of El Cielo on a holistic plant conservation project in the El Cielo Biosphere Reserve in Tamaulipas, Mexico.

The money will fund materials and manpower needed to implement an educational orchid programme at the Jardin Botanico de Alta Cima.

Presentations will then be made to all villages in the vicinities of where wild orchid populations are found in a bid to reduce human impact on these plants.

Field study

The grant will also furnish seed money for a field project aimed at establishing baseline data on three of El Cielo's rarest orchids – *Euchile mariae*, *Stanhopea tigrina* and *Laelia speciosa*.

WildShare International will collaborate with the University of Oklahoma and Institute of Ecology and Food (Autonomous University of Tamaulipas), as well as community members from Alta Cima

and Joya de Salas, to carry out the field study. Results of the work are due to be published in 2008.

Lastly, a permanent educational display featuring living specimens and bilingual graphic displays will be installed in the Jardin Botanico de Alta Cima in 2007.

It is hoped that the grant can be used to heighten awareness of Mexico's orchids for thousands of annual visitors and also residents of the reserve.

Botanical garden

Alongside the work to protect the orchids, the development of the El Cielo botanical garden and arboretum is providing alternative sources of income for local residents, conserving biodiversity, reducing pressure on native flora and providing educational information for visitors and residents alike. Local women are learning to cultivate rare plants through in-situ conservation, and some of these plants will be sold.

The community of Alta Cima received a grant from Botanical Gardens Conservation International to begin the first phase of the botanic garden in 2006.

• For periodic updates on the Jardin Botanico de Alta Cima project visit www.elcielobiosphere.org/conservation.html