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World's tallest orchid in full bloom in Penang

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GEORGE TOWN: They aren't crouching tigers, but these Tiger Orchids are now blossoming from their 3.3m plant at the Penang Botanic Gardens.

The Tiger Orchid is known to be the tallest orchid species in the world.

"The orchid has been blooming for the past week. The speckled flowers resemble a tiger's coat. They will likely last for another three weeks," said the gardens' research officer Dr Ooi Im Hin.

He said the orchid plant is located at the entrance of the garden, where the old raintree used to be.

"Scientifically known as *grammatophyllum speciosum*, it is a species native to Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi) but it has also been recorded in the Philippines, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

"We received this particular plant as a donation from Forest Research Institute Malaysia research officer Ong Poh Teck, who is an orchid enthusiast from Selangor, on Aug 2, 2018," he said.

The Tiger Orchid could be considered rare due to poaching but



Star attraction: The Tiger orchid is located at the entrance of the Penang Botanic Gardens. — LIM BENG TATT/The Star

enthusiasts had managed to propagate it, he added.

He said he had only seen this orchid in the wild once in Balik Pulau last year.

"It is a plant with epiphytic tendencies, meaning it thrives by growing on other plants or trees for support while maintaining its own sustenance. Occasionally, it also exhibits lithophytic behaviour, growing on rocks and creating striking root bundles."

It is listed by the Guinness Book

of World Records as the world's tallest orchid, with specimens recording up to 7.62m in height.

In 1893, a specific specimen obtained by Frederick K. Sander & Co near the Penang Island weighed a metric tonne.

This weighty find was divided, with one half being showcased at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and the other half sent to the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

By 1902, the specimen housed in the Singapore Botanic Garden

grew to a remarkable size, measuring 14m in circumference and standing at three metres.

It simultaneously bore an array of 2,090 flowers along with 1,110 unopened buds.

More recently in 2000, two biologists came across a plant in Borneo which was 7.6m in width, adorned with an array of 2,500 to 5,000 flowers.

It had completely wrapped around a host tree located 46m above the ground.