orchids orgy

written by Andreas | 24 June, 2018

One of the most frequent and conspicous orchids on the terrain is *Orchis purpurea* with almost 100 flowering plants every year. 15 April 2007

Cephalanthera damasonium appeared this spring with 3 representatives on this spot in the shade of the oak wood. It was probably already present in former years but only with bulbs or leaves or perhaps it was eaten before flowering, which happened with 2 of the 3 specimen afterwards. 23 May 2018.

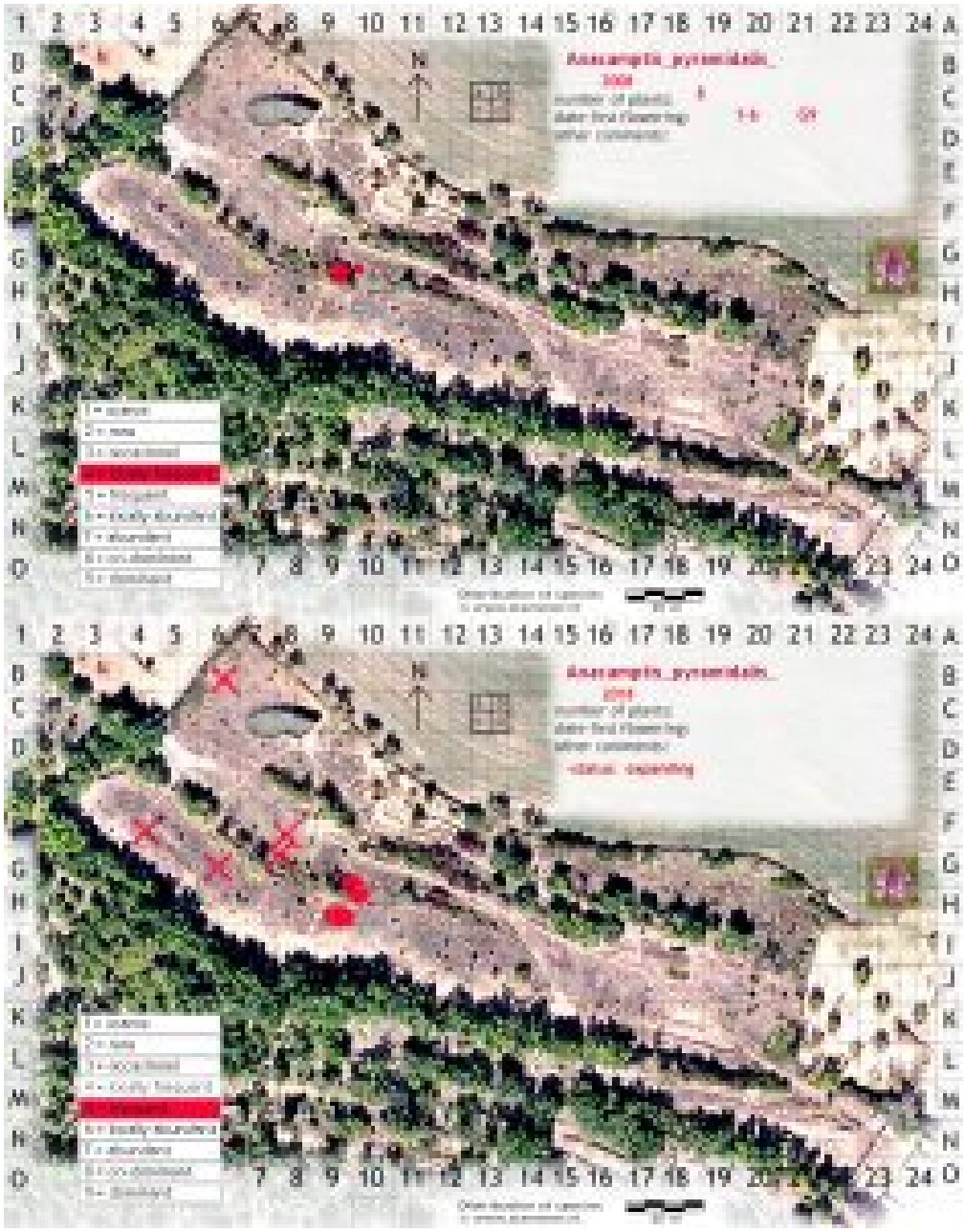
The fact that one hectare of land harbours more than 250 native species is already a feat but the presence of at least 9 different species of the Orchid family is remarkable. This spring they were exceptionally abundant. This ´orgy´ was probably partly due to the very wet weather but I have noticed a steady increase over the years, not only in plant numbers but also in species number. For example this year I welcomed the sudden arrival of 3 plants of Cephalanthera damasonium. Members of the Orchid family are notorious for their erratic and unexpected behavior, appearing one year in abundance and then hiding for several years.

Ophrys insectifera. 3 May 2009.

Ophrys apifera. 10 June 2007.

Ophrys apifera. 10 June 2007

Anacamptis pyramidalis has steadily increased its numbers and area over the years. It started from this area in the semi-shade of a holm oak in front of the greenhouse back in 2008 and appeared on several other spots since then. 8 June 2010.



The distribution maps of *Anacamptis pyramidalis* of resp. 2008 and 2018. The spectacular increase in 2018 is probably partly due to the exceptionally wet spring.

Almost all of the present orchid species seem to prefer the transition zone between wood and grassland. The fact that my terrain is rich in this kind of border niches may partly account for so many orchids. Related to this border effect is their tendency towards human culture, that is they prefer semi-natural situations where humans have a low but decisive impact on nature: mowing grass, pruning or cutting trees, moving soil.

Their relationships with other mammals is, in my experience so far, somewhat controversial. It seems that sheep for example love to eat the generally tender broad leaves of orchids and the fact that sheep don´t enter the terrain may have a positive impact. But I also notice that badgers, wild boar, weasels and/or similar wild animals which do enter the terrain, go for the bulbs or rhizomes of the orchid, digging very specifically like expert botanists. A positive side-effect might be that while digging they help to spread the extremely fine seed (and the necessary mycorrhiza).

Limodorum abortivum is a very peculiar orchid. Better quote Wikipedia: " …although Limodorum contains photosynthetic pigments, these are insufficient to support the nutrition of the adult plant which is believed to rely entirely on a mycoheterotrophic or parasitic relationship with fungi, primarily of the family Russulaceae. Seeds are among the largest produced by orchids and seedlings develop very slowly, remaining entirely below ground for 8–10 years before flowering." 19 May 2007.

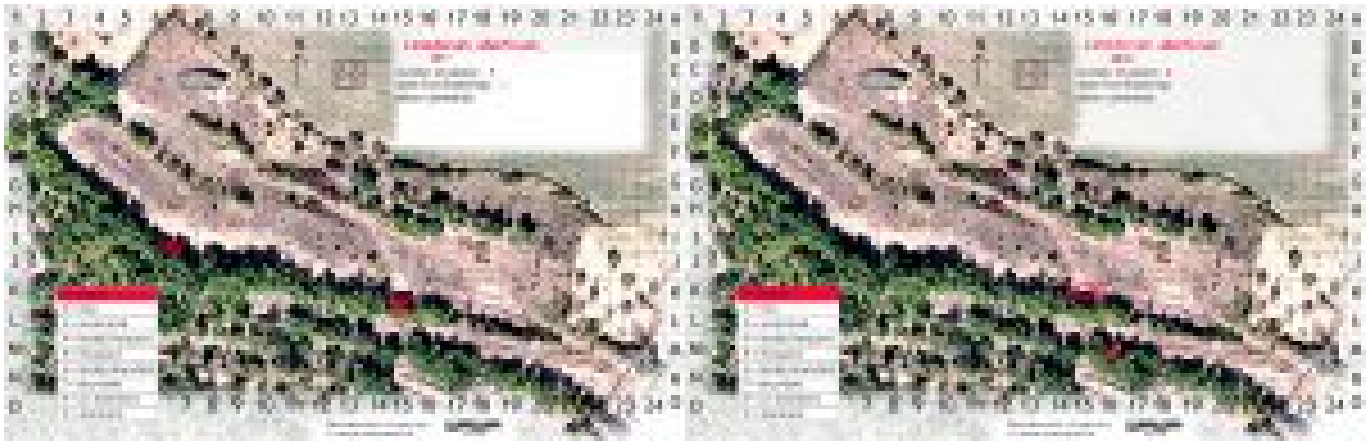
The leaves of *Limodorum abortivum* are reduced to mysterious scales. 19 May 2007.

Ophrys sphegodes is one of the most unpredictable orchids on the terrain, appearing on different spots every year. It´s also the earliest one to flower and distinguishable by the yellow-green sepals. 4 April 2010.

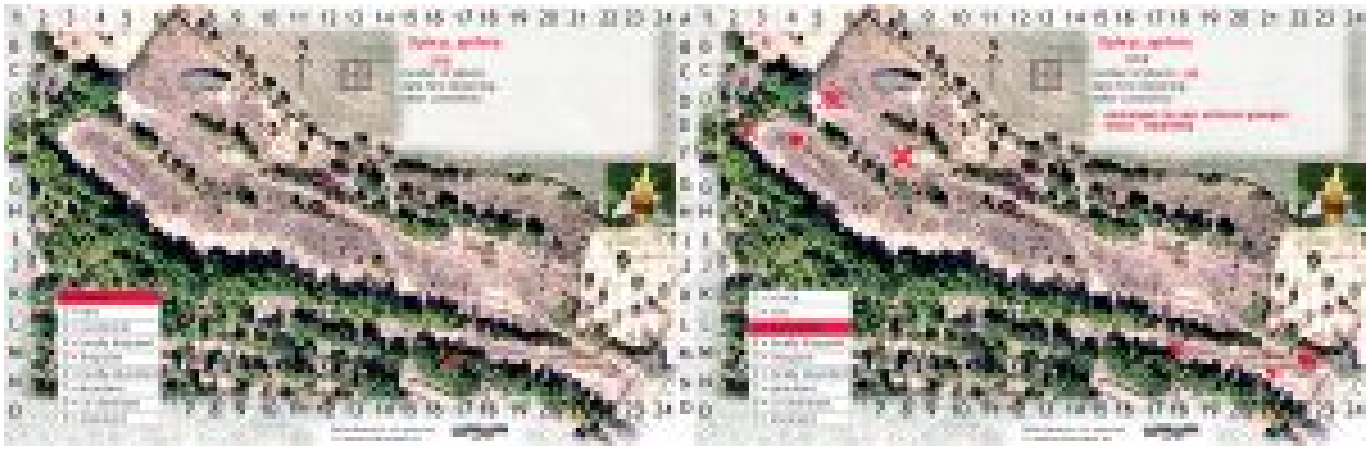
The flowers of *Orchis purpurea* can vary their colours considerably but this completely white specimen (*´variant albiflora´*) seems to be quite rare, according to Peter Zschunke on his website. 2 May 2018 17:20

Cephalanthera damasonium was first detected in 2018.

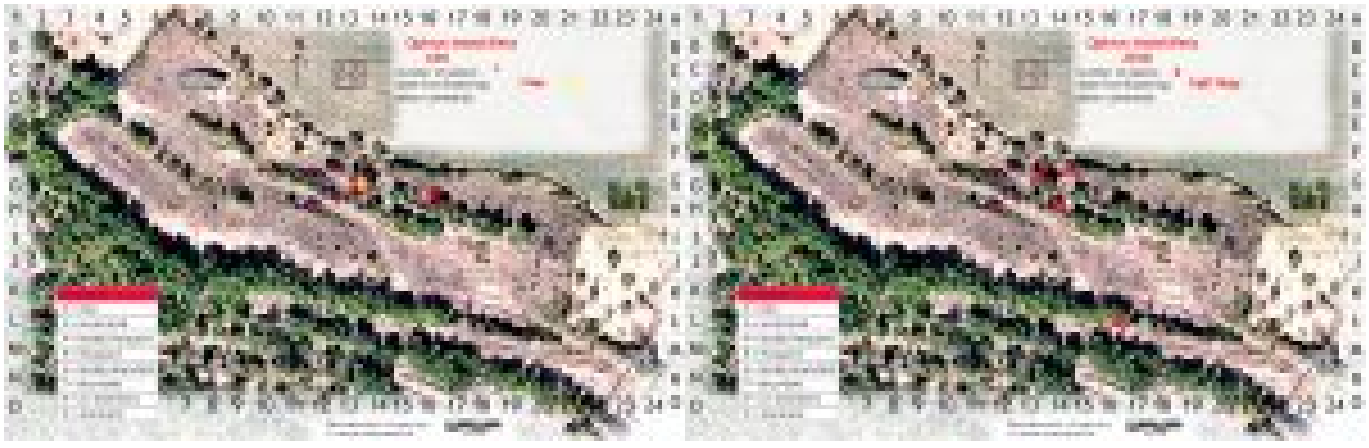
Below are shown, in alphabetical order, the distribution maps of the other orchid species present on the terrain. For the *Epipactis* species I have no reliable data yet, as it´s not very clear if it´s just one species (*Epipactis helleborine*) or several (sub-)species, but every year there appear about a dozen of them spread over the terrain, especially on the borders of woodland and grassland.



Changes in the presence of *Limodorum abortivum* over a 7 year period.



Changes in the presence of *Ophrys apifera* over a 10 year period.



Ophrys insectifera was first discovered in 2009.

No data of *Orchis purpurea* for 2018, but numbers and distribution have grown little by little over the years.

Only data of *Ophrys sphegodes* from the year 2013, as it flowers quite eary in the year and escapes the survey later in spring.

Changes in the presence of *Ophrys scolopax* over a 10 year period.