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OBITUARY
JAIME A. AGUILAR VELÁSQUEZ (1961–2018)

FRANCO PUPULIN

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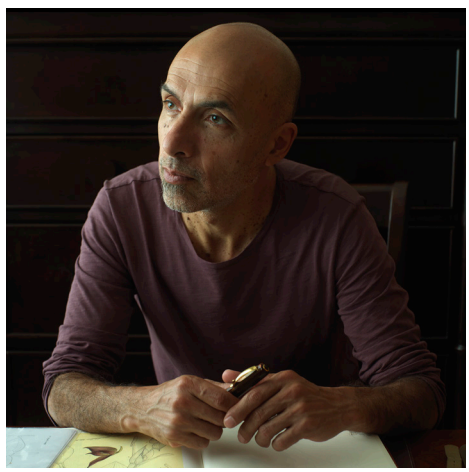

Jaime died almost secretly, after a short and calm fight against the father of all ills, a pancreatic cancer that defeated him at the end of last May. He had been absent from the Lankester Botanical Garden for a few months, and the privacy of his character pushed him not to bother his colleagues with the news of an evil that had no remedy. Some of us are still incredulous of his passing.

Jaime Alberto Aguilar Velásquez was the senior official at our botanical garden, where he had started working in 1985, then 24 years old, when Lankester was little more than a fascinating land with trees festooned with orchids and a small greenhouse in the most remote corner of the property. Here were grown the rarest of the plants that have been owned by the already mythical Charles H. Lankester.

During the time of the directorship of Dora Emilia Mora de Retana, Jaime took charge of the organization of Lankester's field courses, mostly devoted to the study of orchids, decorative and edible plants, and the rich ornithological fauna of Costa Rica. They were very busy courses, and to the lecture time spent in the (then) small classroom, followed splendid trips, sometimes of several days, with a bus that ran along the streets and woods of Costa Rica. Jaime often accompanied the participants along with the professors of the courses, and he became an excellent guide, particularly in the virtues and use of medicinal plants. The great botanist and dendrologist, Luis Poveda Álvarez, now Professor Emeritus with the National University, was his mentor and one of his friends. I remember Jaime, in the early Nineties, getting on the bus with a "satellite phone", the height of modernity at the time, which was much more voluminous than a good iron! When, at the beginning of the new millennium, the Botanical Garden abandoned the program of field courses, Jaime's proverbial organization was very regretted.

With the inauguration of the Lankester *in vitro* micropropagation laboratory during the late 1990s, the meticulousness and precision of Jaime's work were placed at the service of orchid conservation. Thousands of beautiful plants were taken out of the laboratory for years, making their way into the collection of the botanical garden for the joy of the visitors. Most were threatened species of the Costa Rican flora, such as *Guarianthe skinneri*, as well as species of *Brassia* and *Trichopilia*, but also uncommon miniatures such as *Pleurothallis tonduzii*, of which the living collections of our center still host dozens of splendid specimens.

Meanwhile, with a Pentax K1000 camera, a normal SMC 50 mm lens and a set of extension tubes, he used his passion and innate talent in photography to document the garden's collections on film.

In 2006, Aguilar temporarily left the Lankester Botanical Garden to move to the United Kingdom, where he soon began his research association with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). He was an externally funded staff member of the RBGE Herbarium until 2012[1], where he mainly worked on databasing and digitization, collaborating to the goal of 250 thousand specimens imaged and online by the end of 2012[2].

His previous experience in the micropropagation laboratory allowed him to assume leadership of a research carried out at the RBGE, aimed at the *ex situ* conservation of two rare Scottish orchid species, *Dactylorhiza ebudensis* and *D. traunsteinerioides*. For this project, turfs were lifted from wild populations to ensure the best possible association between orchids and their growing environment, and wild harvested seeds were sowed in a combined *in vitro* experiment, leading to two different successful *ex situ* conservation methods[3].

In 2012 Jaime returned to the Lankester Botanical Garden, where he reincorporated as a staff member at the Research Department of the center. He took charge of the databasing of the living and auxiliary collections, including the spirit collection, the collection of pollinaria and that of dehydrated tissues in silica gel. As a fine photographer, he devoted himself to the digital documentation of selected orchid groups, within the frame of the research projects at Lankester intended to complete the treatment of Orchidaceae for *Flora costaricensis*. He was an active researcher in the difficult group of Pleurothallidinae[4,5], as well as in the study of the historical background of the discovery of orchid diversity[6,7,8].

He mastered microphotography, and his work at the Microscopy Laboratory was instrumental to the creation and launch of *e-pollinaria*, a recent project of the Lankester Garden in which Jaime took an active role. In 2014 he participated in an international symposium on the biology of the Euglossine bees, carried out at La Gamba, in the Osa peninsula of Costa Rica, where he presented a poster on the advances of the digital pollinaria collection at our research center[9]. The following year, Jaime founded the Lankester Orchid Scent Collection, as a result of a cooperative project with Dr. Santiago Ramírez of the University of California Davis, mostly focusing in species of the subtribe Stanhopeinae, well known for their pollination relationship with perfume collecting Euglossine male bees. He personally extracted the floral perfumes of tenths of *Gongora* and *Stanhopea* species, learning the technique to do it properly and teaching it to other assistants at the Lankester Garden, who hopefully will take over his work.

As a colleague, and a friend, he will be sorely missed.

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[4] Pupulin, F., M. Díaz-Morales, **J. Aguilar** & M. Fernández (2017a). Two new species of *Pleurothallis* (Orchidaceae: Pleurothallidinae) allied to *P. cardiothallis*, with a note on flower activity. *Lankesteriana*, 17(2), 329–356.

[5] Pupulin, F., M. Díaz-Morales, M. Fernández & **J. Aguilar (**2017b). Two new species of *Pleurothallis* (Orchidaceae: Pleurothallidinae) from Costa Rica in the *P. phyllocardia* group. *Lankesteriana*, 17(2), 153–164.

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[9] Pupulin, F., M. Fernández & **J. Aguilar** (2014). The Pollinaria Collection at Lankester Botanical Garden, University of Costa Rica. Poster. International Orchid Bees Symposium, La Gamba, February 2014.