

Orchids of Tenerife

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report 31st January – 3rd February 2026



Tour leaders Jon Dunn & Dave Fairhurst

Trip report by Jon Dunn

(Images, clockwise from top left: *Habenaria tridactylites* © Doug; *Orchis canariensis* © Rick;

Gennaria diphylla © Doug; *Himantoglossum metlesicsianum* © Jan)



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Day 1, 31st January

Arrivals went smoothly at Tenerife South, with the new biometric border controls seemingly either not fully operational yet, or working more seamlessly than anyone had fully expected!

Once everyone had assembled, we headed north around the western flank of mighty Mount Teide, working off our absent orchid tour leader's up-to-date orchid information... Fate had intervened, so Dr Richard Bate wasn't with us as planned, but for the very best and happiest of reasons – he was with his wife back in the UK, about to welcome a son into the world! Nonetheless, while Richard couldn't be with us, he was there in spirit – he'd equipped leaders Jon and Dave with the benefit of his meticulous pre-tour planning, so we knew exactly where we'd be going, and what we should be seeing.

A little over an hour later, we parked our vehicles on a gravelly pull-off at the side of a quiet road, and set off on foot up an uneven rocky track into a network of terraces on the lower slopes of Teide. Once upon a time these terraces would have been the scene of more intensive agriculture but, for the most part, these days they're in a more ruderal state, generally rather abandoned but for some fruit trees. Not that the blooming trees were what we had in mind here – other, far more delectable flowers were on our minds.

We'd no sooner set foot on a wide terrace than Jon caught sight of our target – and it was hard to miss, for even from a distance the tall, pinkish-violet flowers of Tenerife Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum metlesicsianum* were hard to miss. Growing in the slightly damp and shaded lea of a terrace wall, a dozen orchids were in full, exuberant bloom, their flowers in pristine condition, and glittering in the warm sunshine that was such a welcome change from the wind and rain of a northern European winter.

These were immense flowers in every sense, both literally and figuratively. One of the very rarest orchids in Europe, and standing a foot high before us. We had all the time in the world in which to enjoy them, and we had them to ourselves. We took our time, drinking in their beauty, taking photos and, in the case of several of the group, wandering to see if we could find any more nearby. Sure enough, several non-flowering plants were discovered around the vicinity of the terrace, and an isolated flowering plant near to the track that, growing in the open, was in less than pristine condition.



We ambled back to our vehicles, distracted by the first of what would prove to be many Canary Islands Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus canariensis* we would see in the next couple of days, and set our sights further

north, hoping to see a second Canary endemic orchid on arrivals day – we had *Orchis canariensis* on our minds...

The site at which we might hope to see the first of this somewhat later-flowering species was everything the first site was not – it was at the side of an extremely busy, narrow and twisting road. Busy for good reason – the views from the road were spectacular, and hence regular coaches and hire cars were making their way along the road's many switchbacks to enjoy the vistas. We found somewhere safe to park, and began to quarter the ground



Canary Islands Chiffchaff © Acid John

enclosed between a sharp switchback, a site at which we knew *Orchis canariensis* would be present. Present, maybe... but we found no plants in the time available to us. Not to worry, we had time in hand to return here and, having seen the site for ourselves, we could lay our plans accordingly – we would return earlier in the day, on a weekday, and in 48 hours' time, to allow the orchids as much time as possible in which to come into bloom.

We could scarcely be disappointed after such a brilliant opening encounter with Tenerife Giant Orchid and, with this very much in mind, we made our way to our extremely comfortable hotel, where we checked in and met the final member of our group, Susanne, who had arrived there the day before. We reassured her we would go back to the giant orchids in due course, ensuring nobody would miss anything in the course of the tour... and settled into the hotel for the first fabulous evening meal from a buffet that was a veritable cornucopia!

Day 2, 1st February

They say you should always eat your greens. And while we'd not be eating any orchids, today was to be an appreciation of the greens, with two green-flowered orchids to search for, *Gennaria diphylla*, and *Habenaria tridactylites*. Armed with Richard's detailed site information, we set off with spirits high and great confidence.

Nor was that misplaced, for we'd no sooner set foot on the site for the morning, a steep hillside of low laurisilva habitat that dropped away towards the coastal strip from a village perched high above it, than Rick spotted our first *Habenaria tridactylites*!



Habenaria tridactylites © Rick B

This delicate orchid, with its exaggerated three-pronged lip, is an architectural wonder in the plant world. We were delighted to find it was not uncommon here on the hillside, with many more happy exclamations to be heard as we split up to wander and explore, and soon everyone was finding their own plants. Other wildflowers were to be seen here too – not



Canary Bellflower appreciation © Jan Y

least some fine examples of the large and dramatic, flaming orange Canary Bellflower *Canarina canariensis*.

Our other orchid target, *Gennaria diphylla*, was also present here on the hillside. Once we got our eyes in, we found plenty of it, the distinctive leaves a giveaway. Most, however, were still a good way off flowering, and even the most advanced flowerspikes were still in bud. The happy payback of this, of course, was that it meant the earlier-flowering *Habenaria* was still to be found in fresh condition – and we knew that at our lunchtime and early afternoon site we would enjoy *Gennaria* in full bloom.

A short drive, made somewhat longer by inscrutable road closures for a village fiesta, brought us to the end of a dead-end road that led, as a track, deeper into the foothills in the north of the island. We opted to enjoy our picnic lunch first before looking for orchids – the day was fine and sunny, so we made short work of our food, greatly distracted by some wildlife that just wouldn't leave us alone – in particular a fine male Canary Brimstone *Gonepteryx cleobule* that flew through the midst of us before flirting with us some more, cutting in and out of small thickets of bushes, almost but never quite actually settling... his acid yellow wings and flaming orange forewing patches were magnificent in flight, anyway. Cathy meanwhile found our first of the extremely distinctive black and white Canary Islands Bumblebee *Bombus canariensis*, a striking creature we'd all be on the lookout for the following day having seen her photos.



Canary Islands Bumblebee © Cathy

As we set off to walk a short distance up into the hills along the track, reptiles took centre stage for a moment – a colony of Tenerife Lizard *Gallotia galloti* were particularly showy, some of the larger specimens sporting vibrant neon blue spots on their flanks for good



Tenerife Lizard © Acid John

measure. Sharp eyes spotted something more unobtrusive – a West Canary Skink *Chalcides viridanus*. After a brief show in the open, this shy, shiny herp tucked himself almost out of sight. We promised it we would be back in an hour or two...

The walk up the track was extremely pleasant, a slow amble interrupted by Island Darter *Sympetrum nigrifemur* and showy European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, the latter of which,

depending on your taxonomic position, are at worst an endemic island subspecies *superbus* and, at best, may be a wholly unique species all in their own right. Before long Jon had found the first of several excellent small colonies of *Gennaria diphylla* growing on the banks

of the track. These were fully in flower, and while every bit as green as the *Habenaria* of the morning, none the less beautiful in their own, understated, way.

Dave and some of the group wandered a little further along the track and were rewarded by several more Canary Brimstone; while Jon and the remainder of the group slowly made their way back down towards our vehicles. Another West Canary Skink was a fantastically showy example of its kind, very approachable indeed with a little fieldcraft, slow movements and maintaining a respectful distance. Great photos were there to be taken! When we returned to the post-lunch lizard colony, it was to find yet another skink nearby, posing beautifully in the reflected heat of a stone wall. Whoever said these reptiles were shy?



Gennaria diphylla © Doug M

Our final stop for the day was a speculative roll of the dice – we knew that tomorrow we had unfinished business with *Orchis canariensis*, but it certainly wouldn't hurt to try another site in the meantime, albeit one that traditionally flowers later than our main site. Given it wasn't far away, it seemed like a good idea. The landscape alone, high into the conifer clad hills, was worth the drive, as evidenced by fair numbers of Tenerifeans out enjoying the



West Canary Skink © Cathy B

countryside at the weekend. We took a walk into the hills, not entirely surprised that the *Orchis canariensis* weren't in flower yet, but happy to add another non-flowering orchid to our credit, thanks to Beth's sharp eyes – once we'd seen our first Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* rosette, we couldn't stop seeing their heavily spotted and mottled leaves among the long pine needles on the forest floor.

Birding interest was good here, with Canary Islands Chaffinch *Fringilla canariensis* and, most pleasingly, our first Tenerife Goldcrest *Regulus regulus teneriffae* too. Having Dave's sharp eyes and finely-attuned birding senses was proving a real asset to the group.

Day 3, 2nd February

We were a team on a mission today, with just one of Tenerife's special orchids in flower remaining outstanding – *Orchis canariensis*. We would return to the first site we'd briefly tried during the weekend on arrivals day, but instead of during the afternoon on a busy Saturday, we'd aim to be there first thing on a weekday.



Barbary Partridge © Cathy B

Those well-laid plans were ever so slightly disrupted, albeit in the noblest possible cause, by the discovery of a Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara* in our hotel's front garden. Indeed,



not just in the front garden, but obsessing over his own reflection in a hotel window! Granted, a somewhat unconventional view of a wild bird, but we couldn't complain about how close he was to us! The hotel had also supplied Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Atlantic Canary *Serinus canaria*, African Blue Tit *Cyanistes teneriffae*, and flyover Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, so the partridge was merely the latest pleasant birding surprise on our doorstep.

Once we'd all taken a look at this gamest of gamebirds, we hit the road and headed back high into the hills to look for *Orchis canariensis*. Richard's on-site directions had been somewhat refined and, having arrived and found parking spaces without incident, we spread out onto the hillside

above the road to search for the orchid. After a little under an hour, Beth's sharp eyes had found several rosettes, confirming the orchid's presence here, but Dave had pulled a rabbit out of the hat – he'd found *canariensis* in flower!

Befitting our vertiginous position high above the island – so vertiginous there were rainbows in the clouds below us – the orchid was to be found just over the lip of a cliff that dropped some 100 metres down below us. Obtaining photos, therefore, necessitated nerves of steel for those (like Jon) who weren't particularly keen on heights! We took our turns one by one to take photos, mission accomplished.



Lunch was taken beside a small chapel down in the lowlands where, in the rough countryside behind the chapel, we enjoyed a little wander with butterflies on our mind – Southern Brown Argus *Aricia cramera* and Canary Speckled Wood *Pararge xiphioides* put in an appearance – and we emulated some of the local families who were also arriving for a picnic, cracking delicious almonds from the trees scattered among the scrub.



From here we began to head uphill onto Teide, taking time to stop once more for the Tenerife Giant Orchid, giving Susanne her first views of these beauties, and the rest of us second helpings of them. The sky today was white cloud, absolutely perfect for photography, so we all enjoyed the opportunity to take our time with them once more.

We pushed on up Teide, stopping on several occasions to enjoy the otherworldly views past volcanic activity had wrought on the landscape and, finally, at a café where we could have a coffee and some Tenerife Blue

Chaffinch *Fringilla teydea* action. These bright blue birds, and Atlantic Canary, were conveniently habituated to the café's activity, and were coming down to feed on and around the tables. Seeing we were keen to enjoy the birds, one of the café staff brought out a handful of seed, and the finches duly obliged, to the enjoyment of all, and not just the visiting naturalists – there were several non-birding patrons seen taking photos on their phones. Blue Chaffinches make pretty good birding ambassadors.



With endemic orchids, birds, and butterflies all seen today, we returned to the hotel in high spirits for our final dinner.

Day 4, 3rd February

Departures day after our long weekend in Tenerife, though some folk would be staying on in the islands for a longer break. We therefore headed back towards the airport in the south of the island, where Cathy could meet up with her husband, and Doug and Beth, Bill, and Jan could collect a hire car for onward exploration on Gran Canaria. Our journey to the airport was a meandering one, allowing for two stops that would give opportunities for both the island's special pigeons Laurel Pigeon *Columba junoniae* and Bolle's Pigeon *Columba bollii* – and with Dave on the case, both were duly seen.



This had been a fabulous mid-winter break, and new friendships had been forged, and a great many orchid-hunting plans laid. Jon would be seeing almost all of Team Tenerife again very soon in the Eastern Mediterranean...

Dave and Jon would like to thank everyone who joined us in Tenerife for their great company – many laughs were shared during our time together. We'd also all like to wish hearty congratulations to Richard and his wife for the safe arrival of the newest member of their family. We missed Richard, but thanks to his hard work on Tenerife beforehand, everything went wonderfully smoothly and all our targets were easily found. He'll be back in Tenerife leading his tour in 2027!

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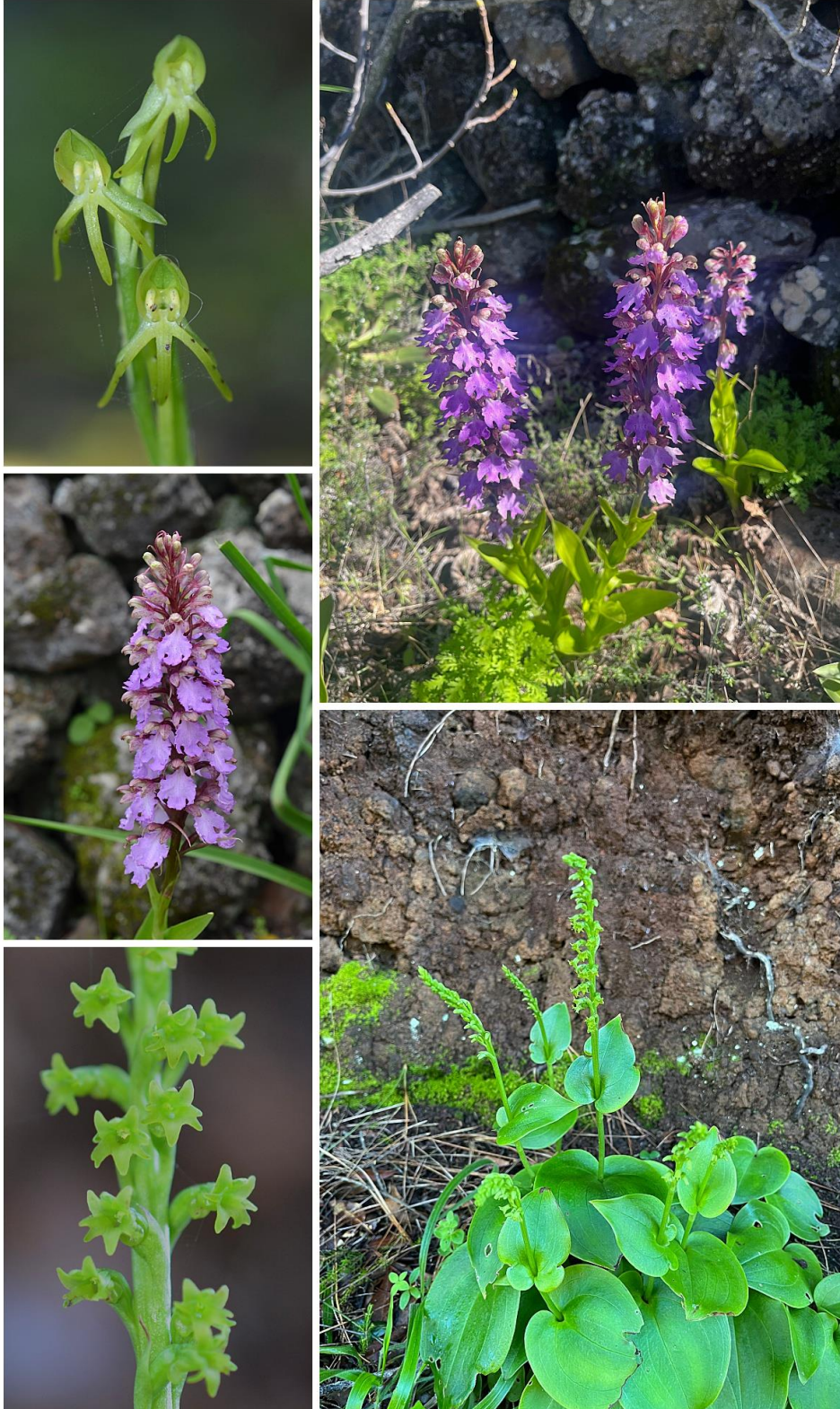
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ORCHIDS OF TENERIFE 31 January – 3 February 2026							
Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4			
<i>Orchis canariensis</i>			✓				
<i>Habenaria tridactylites</i>		✓					
<i>Gennaria diphylla</i>		✓					
<i>Himantoglossum metlesicsianum</i>	✓		✓				
<i>Neotinea maculata</i>		nf					
Butterflies							
Canary Skipper <i>Thymelicus christi</i>							
Southern Brown Argus <i>Aricia cramera</i>			✓				
Geranium Bronze <i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>							
Lang's Short-tailed Blue <i>Leptotes pirithous</i>							
Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>							
Canary Blue <i>Cyclus webbianus</i>							
African Grass Blue <i>Zizeeria knysna</i>	✓						
Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓		✓				
Monarch <i>Danaus plexippus</i>							
Plain Tiger <i>Danaus chrysipus</i>							
Canary Speckled Wood <i>Pararge xiphinoides</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓		✓			
Canary Red Admiral <i>Vanessa vulcania</i>	✓	✓		✓			
Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓		✓				
American Painted Lady <i>Vanessa virginiensis</i>							
African Migrant <i>Catospilla florella</i>							
Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>	✓	✓					
Tenerife Green-striped White <i>Euchloe eversi</i>							
Canary Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx cleobule</i>		✓					
Canary Large White <i>Pieris cheiranthi</i>							
Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Bath White <i>Pontia daplidice</i>							
Birds recorded							
Canary Islands Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus canariensis</i>							
Atlantic Canary <i>Serinus canaria</i>							
Plain Swift <i>Apus unicolor</i>							
African Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>							

Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>							
Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>							
Tenerife Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula superbis</i>							
Tenerife Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus teneriffae</i>							
Canary Islands Chaffinch <i>Fringilla canariensis</i>							
Western Cattle Egret <i>Ardea ibis</i>							
Ring-necked Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>							
Sardinian Warbler <i>Curruca melanocephala</i>							
Tenerife Blue Chaffinch <i>Fringilla teydea</i>							
Barbary Partridge <i>Alectoris barbara</i>							
Berthelot's Pipit <i>Anthus berthelotii</i>							
Laurel Pigeon <i>Columba junoniae</i>							
Bolle's Pigeon <i>Columba bollii</i>							
Species name							
Miscellaneous flora & fauna recorded							
Emperor <i>Anax imperator</i>							
Island Darter <i>Sympetrum nigrifemur</i>							
Tenerife Lizard <i>Gallotia galloti</i>							
West Canary Skink <i>Chalcides viridanus</i>							
Canary Islands Bumblebee <i>Bombus canariensis</i>							
European Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>							

Galleries

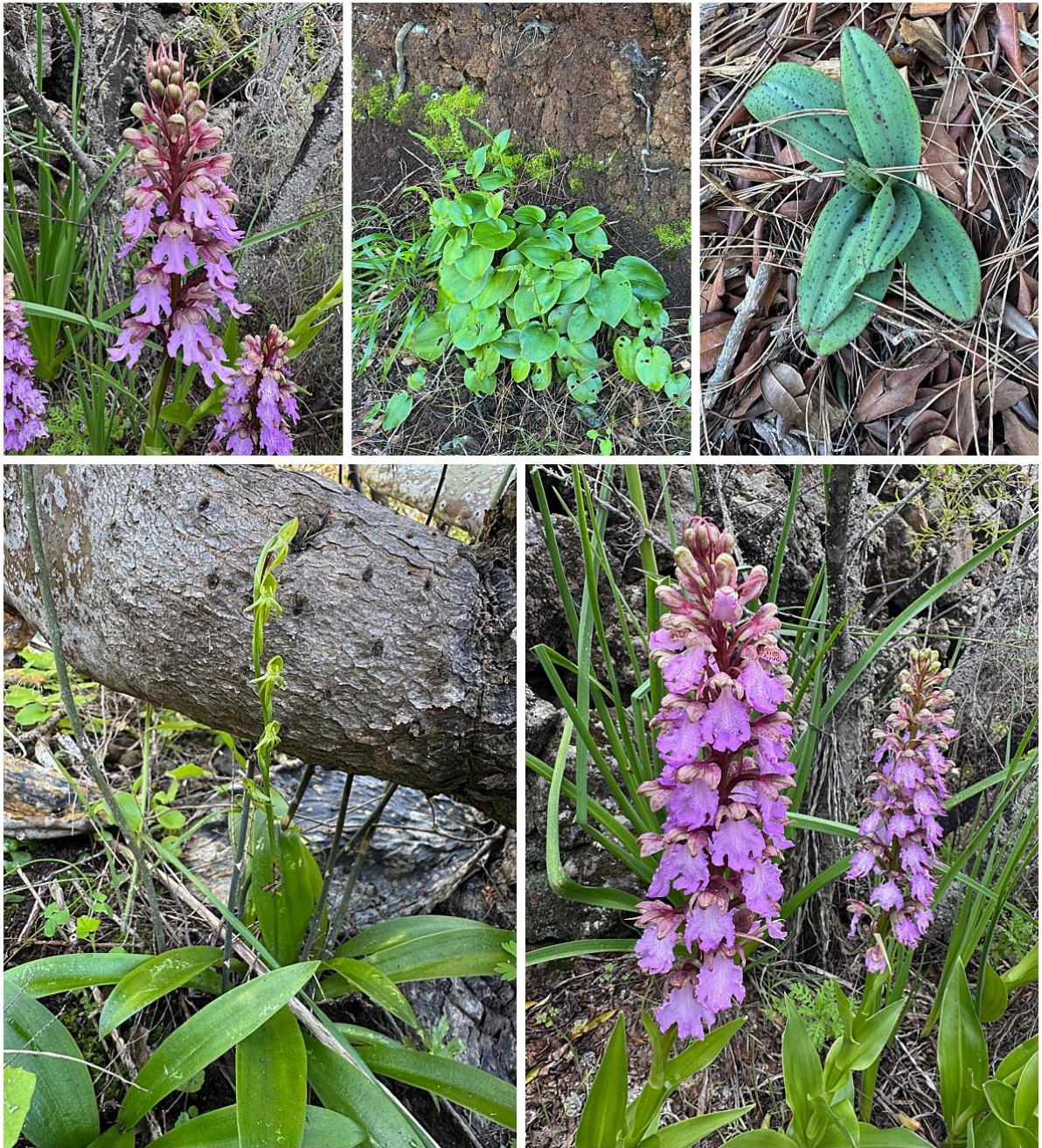
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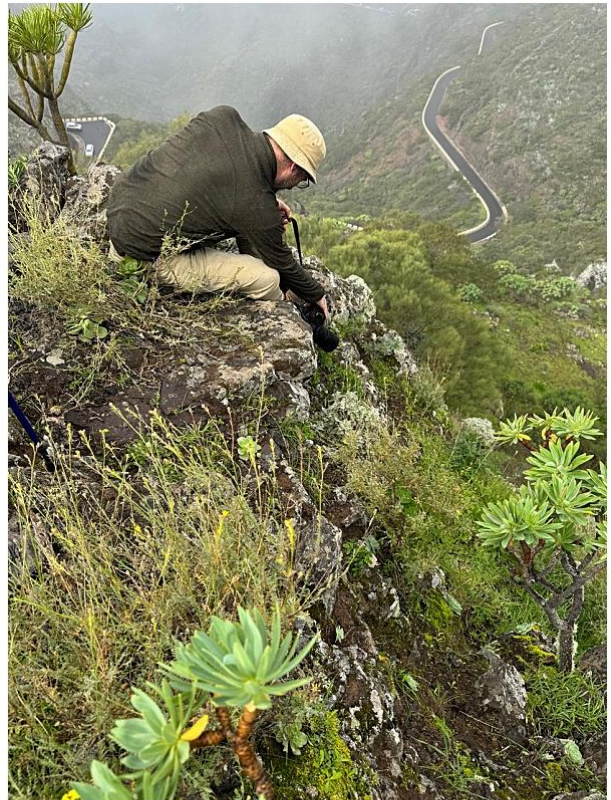
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[Orchids of Tenerife](#)

Alternatively, we have other orchid tours in 2027 with our team of dedicated orchid-hunters that might take your fancy...

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[Orchids of Rhodes](#)