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Seduced by exotica

ORCHIDS that mimic female wasps may not only waste the time of the male wasps they lure into spreading their pollen — they also seduce them into wasting valuable sperm, researchers say.

And the flowers benefit twice — getting help in their own reproduction, and perhaps indirectly producing more male pollinators in the process.

Some of the most exotic orchids evolved their convoluted shapes to attract insects that collect and transfer pollen as they try to mate with the flowers.

“The effect of deception on pollinators has been considered negligible, but we show pollinators may suffer considerable costs,” researchers from Macquarie University in Sydney said.

The wasps involved produce female offspring through mating but can produce male wasps asexually. Fewer matings could therefore increase the proportion of male wasps, they said.