

THE ROCK GARDEN 128



January 2012

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The ROCK GARDEN

The Journal of the
Scottish Rock Garden Club
January 2012

Number 128

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The Editor welcomes articles, photographs and illustrations on any aspects of alpine and rock garden plants and their cultivation. Authors are encouraged to submit material electronically but articles may also be submitted in manuscript. Digital images are particularly welcome but 35 mm slides, high quality prints or drawings may also be submitted.

The deadlines for contributions are 1 November for the January issue and 1 April for the July issue. These dates also apply for material for the Yearbook & Show Schedules.

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Contact may also be made through the website: www.srgc.org.uk



Annual general meetings can be fun! Why not come to the next?

AGM, 12th November 2011



Stan da Prato:
Plantsman of the Year
with most first prize
points in section I



Our Secretary Carol
Shaw and President Liz
Mills oversee the
proceedings



Cyril Lafong receives
the tenth bar on his
Gold Medal

The Annual General Meeting of the SRGC was held at 'The Hangar' restaurant at Scone airfield. As usual, we enjoyed photographs, plants, speeches, motions, prizes, food and drink. After lunch we were entertained and inspired by Julia Corden, who spoke of her arduous and very demanding plant-hunting expedition in Bhutan. As you may see from the pictures, it was an occasion of good cheer and all members are cordially invited to attend next year.



Left: Ian Christie receives the
Golden Jubilee Salver for services
to the club

Right: Graham Bunkall retires as
membership secretary and
becomes an honorary vice-president



Members of the SRGC council at the AGM



Jean Band 1930-2011

A Pioneering Businesswoman and Gardener

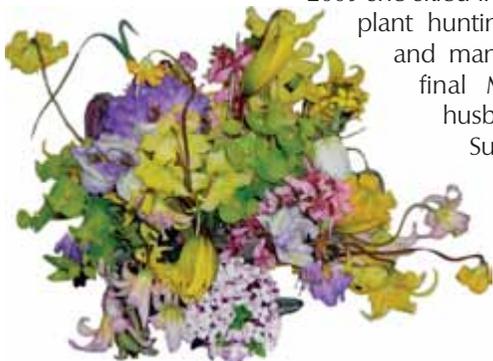
Jean Band, *née* Brien, born at Pitcairngreen in June 1930, died there on June 20th 2011. She was well known to many SRGC members for her work in the early days of *Gardening Scotland*, at the AGMs in Battleby, at the Perth Show and above all in her garden open days.

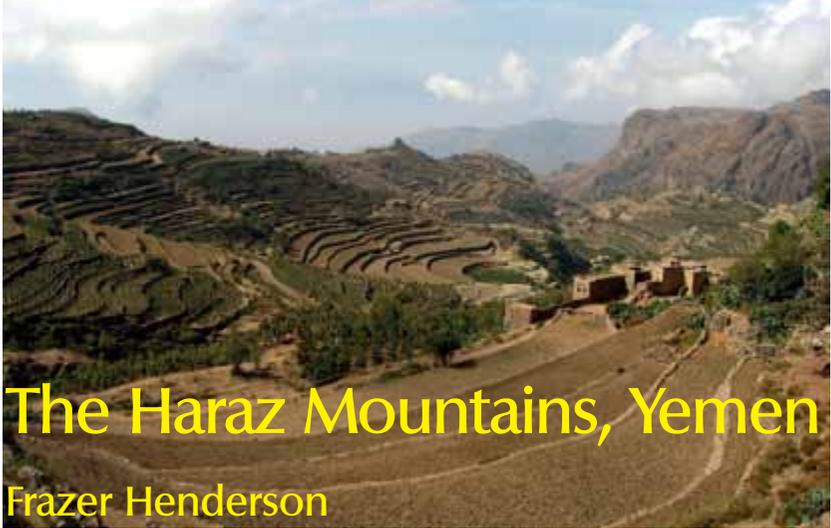
Jean left school in 1946 at the age of 16 and immediately set up business as a grower employing local girls and women. She realised that with post-war import restrictions there would be a market for cut flowers and she proceeded to grow them, selling locally and later to the major flower markets in Scotland and England. She had a long association with Covent Garden. In the early 1950s she realized that she had to diversify so went into white heather and Christmas trees. She eventually became by far the largest grower of white heather in the country and indeed in one week in 1966 she sent 100,000 sprigs to Canada alone. She also supplied travelling people all over Scotland and if you ever bought 'lucky' white heather in Glencoe, Loch Lomond or elsewhere it almost certainly came from Pitcairngreen. On marrying in 1959 she continued to commute from wherever her husband's work took them (Liverpool, Glasgow, Clydebank, London and East Sussex) so as to look after her heather business. On returning to Scotland in 1975 she went out of white heather, the heather field becoming the house and garden (Heathfield). She restarted growing Christmas trees in Almondbank and for a while she had a sideline in supplying Edinburgh and Covent Garden with locally collected wild mushrooms. She was still selling Christmas trees in Pitcairngreen in 2010.

The love of her life was gardening and she built, planted and developed her alpine & woodland garden at Heathfield. It attracted visitors from all over the world. It was packed with rare plants and specialized in woodland bulbs such as erythroniums and fritillaries along with *Meconopsis* and primulas. She was particularly proud of her very large and productive vegetable garden. A long-standing and hard-working member of the Scottish Rock Garden Club, she was awarded our Silver Salver in 2006 for her services to the club and alpine gardening.

Jean loved both the Scottish hills and the Alps and as recently as 2009 she skied in the Italian Alps in the winter, went plant hunting in Switzerland in the summer, and managed what turned out to be her final Munro. She is survived by her husband Tom, son Ewan and daughters Susan and Margaret.

Jean's flowers at the Perth Show,
July 2007





The Haraz Mountains, Yemen

Frazer Henderson

Steep-sided mountains, centuries-old agricultural terracing, fortified villages on exposed rock buttresses, and tumbling streams bounded by small tracts of woodland characterize the Haraz Mountains, an isolated massif within the western escarpment of Yemen and a region at odds with the general preconception of Arabia as a dry, dusty land of unending sand deserts.

The escarpment runs south to north the whole length of western Yemen and extends into Saudi Arabia as the Sarawat and Asir mountains. It is, in general terms, a disordered series of mountains, massifs and high plateaux incised by deep valleys. To the west of the escarpment rests the hot and humid Tihama coastal plain and ultimately the Red Sea. To the east lies the high Yemen plateau which gently slopes to arid hills, then the Great Arabian Desert and, finally, the famed Empty Quarter.

The escarpment was formed during the creation of the Red Sea rift valley with many of its surface formations of volcanic origin. Accordingly, the Haraz Mountains comprise a complex of tuff, basalt and metamorphic rocks together with slabs of partially formed granite and small areas of limestone & sandstone. At 2960 metres, Jabal Shibam is the highest peak

Above and below: Terracing in the Haraz Mountains
Map: Yemen and the Haraz



in the Haraz, followed by Jabal Masar (2760 m), Jabal Bayt Malah (2600 m) and a number of others over 2500 m. The precipitous nature of the mountains means that declines and inclines of over a kilometre are common. Though the rugged mountains are undeniably beautiful I have, at the end of a day's walking, found myself in agreement with Wilfred Thesiger, who wrote '*Nowhere have I experienced more strenuous travelling than in Yemen ... I had the cartilages removed from both knees; apparently I had worn them out!*'

The climate is temperate with a mean daytime temperature of 16°C and an annual range of 4°C. The frost zone is at about 2400 m. Rainfall is surprisingly low, less than 500 mm per year, with most concentrated in April and May and again in late July and early August. However, fog can be common in the afternoons when the warm air of the Tihama rises and meets the cooler air of the mountains. The sudden drop in temperature and ability to navigate safely can be somewhat disconcerting as well as being generally a damn nuisance. The fog does, however, benefit the western slopes of the Haraz, bringing additional moisture and dew in marked contrast to the eastern, sheltered and consequently drier slopes. This contrast is naturally reflected in the distribution of plant species and gives rise to distinctive differences of vegetation between slopes on various aspects.

The Haraz Mountains are a mere two to two and a half hours drive from San'a, the capital of Yemen, and can be accessed easily, either by shared taxi - which is my preference - or as part of a locally-arranged tour.



Once having negotiated the inevitable police checkpoints on the outskirts of San'a, a steady speed is maintained through the foothills of the escarpment with the road rising, falling, twisting and turning as it heads westwards. Flocks of the native small-eared Yemeni sheep may be seen nibbling any remaining vegetation in the denuded landscape. The road travels directly through villages; at times markets spill onto the roadway causing delays as well as opportunities for the ultimate drive-thru shopping experience - as goods and animals are passed through the car windows without stopping.

As the escarpment nears, Jabal an-Nabi Shu'ayb can be clearly seen, at

Yemeni age and youth under the sun

3760 m the highest mountain in Yemen and the Arabian peninsula. Sadly, the upper reaches of the mountain are off-limits and accordingly its Afro-Alpine flora remains largely unrecorded.

At the town of Al-Maghrabah a side road is taken to Manakha, the administrative centre of the Haraz. After fifteen minutes of a tortuously steep climb the taxi exhaustedly arrives at Manakha's car park cum market. This somewhat dishevelled town lies on a narrow ridge that plunges dramatically a thousand metres on both sides and its natural setting means, unlike other settlements of the Haraz, that it has never needed walled fortifications.

The town is a good base from which to access the mountains; it has a number of basic hotels and numerous small stores for supplies. In all directions, agricultural terraces are visible from the town. Apparently, the tradition of terracing has existed for millennia, prompting some to suggest that the Haraz is the fabled Garden of Eden. In their extent the terraces vary from the size of football pitches to parcels of land little more than a book shelf and each is retained and bounded by a dry-stone wall. The land, being volcanic, is fertile and, using simple tools and donkey-ploughs, wheat, barley and sorghum are cultivated. Coffee is also grown; indeed, the area was once famed for the quality of its coffee which was exported through the port of Mokha (from which the term Mocha coffee is derived). Unfortunately, coffee requires irrigation and is being replaced by the more commercially attractive qat (*Catha edulis*), which needs similar conditions. The leaves of the shrub when chewed are a mild stimulant and accordingly attract a high price. Because of its commercial value the qat terraces are protected, especially at night, by armed guards. Qat is an obsession, with almost every Yemeni man spending large parts of the afternoon and early evening meeting with friends or work colleagues to chew qat leaves. The time

From above: *Dianthus uniflorus*;
Pentas lanceolata; *Campanula edulis*





Lakamat al Qadi

spent chewing is considered, depending on viewpoint, either as the single most negative impact on the country's economic development or as an important and positive facet of living that reinforces the close relationship bonds between families and friends.

A large number of terraces which lack irrigation are suffering because of neglect and this is shown markedly in the poor maintenance of the retaining walls. I have noticed walls, having fallen into disrepair, allowing precious soil to slump down the mountain side. Once the wall goes, unless it is repaired quickly, rains will simply wash the ground away.

Botanically the walls hold an attraction with the presence, amongst other species, of the ferns *Adiantum capillus-veneris* and *Asplenium aethiopicum*, the stary white flowered *Minuartia filifolia*, the attractive *Pentas lanceolata*, yellow-flowering *Pulicaria petiolaris* and various *Silene* species. Forskål's Pink, *Dianthus uniflorus*, is a delightful plant; one would have thought it easy to locate because it is relatively common on the plateau and in other areas of the escarpment, particularly at Kawkaban, some fifty miles to the north, where there are extensive mats. But that is not the case: I have found only isolated examples in the Haraz. It is, however, a lovely plant with pink flowers that soften with age. It is endemic to southern Arabia, being also found in Saudi Arabia, but is not recorded in Oman. The plant, described by the Swedish botanist Peter Forskål during his ill-fated expedition in 1792, is reputedly heavily perfumed but I've never yet found that to be the case. The charming *Campanula edulis* with its distinctive striations may also be found on terrace walls. According to Wood (1997) the flowers can be blue or white. I have only seen the blue-flowered version, quite widespread in the Haraz and also found in short grassland. Succulent plants such as *Crassula schimperi* with its moss-like trailing foliage, *Crassula alba* with its erect



Kalanchoe glaucescens

stem and white inflorescence, and the heavily branched *Aeonium chrysanthum* are also found on terrace walls, with the last more commonly found on rocky outcrops.

Just a kilometre to the south of Manakha sits the commanding mountain village of Qahil which can be accessed by a steep, well-worn path and a stone staircase. The village commands wondrous views over the Haraz and particularly the neighbouring village of Lakamat al Qadi. Qahil is largely empty, as former residents have migrated to San'a for employment, but it possesses a faded charm with its white-washed, stone

Crassula alba

Aeonium chrysanthum





Buddleja polystachya

Scadoxus multiflorus



buildings. Around the village can be seen *Kalanchoe glaucescens* with its glossy red telephone-box tubular flowers and large masses of *Aeonium chrysanthum* which, cascading over rocks, give a faintly tropical feel to the surroundings. Beside the foot-weary path are found large stands of *Buddleja polystachya* in which Rüppell's Weaver (*Ploceus galbula*) has established its pendulous nests. The plant's inflorescence is elongated rather than globular and the flowers are a pleasant orange-red. In Britain, *Buddleja* is a plant of disturbed ground and very much associated with human activity. Nevertheless, at Kawkaban I have only found it growing in such circumstances as a roadside plant. *Clematis simensis* grows through the buddleja and once it has fruited it provides small cumulus clouds as a backdrop to the sunny buddleja. On some of the exposed rock faces grows *Macowania ericifolia*, a wiry shrub known elsewhere only in Ethiopia.

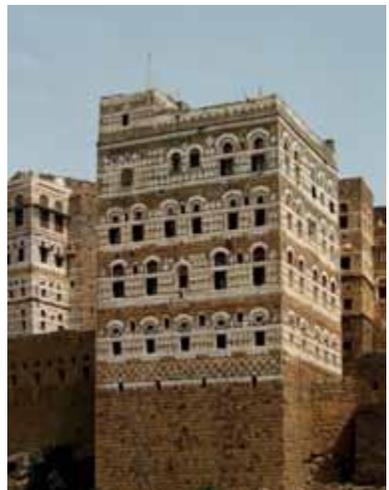
A few remnant *Acacia* species grow along the path. Apparently, the Haraz was once heavily forested with stands of *Acacia*, *Dombeya* and *Grewia* but nowadays very little remains despite some recent plantings to increase coverage. Below the remaining trees, the shrub *Myrsine africana* is fairly common and there are *Senecio* species. Halfway between Manakha and Qahil can be found *Bulbine abyssinica*. It is on an inaccessible ledge well out of the reach of goats and sheep. The inflorescence is a raceme of bright waxy yellow flowers. The only other



Pelargonium alchemilloides spp. *multibracteatum*

bulbous plant that I have seen in flower is *Scadoxus multiflorus* with its starburst-red inflorescence. The plant is known locally as the Snake Plant because of its resemblance to the markings of its stalk to snake's skin.

Heading westwards out of Manakha along the Turks Road – so named because it was previously the principal route taken by Ottoman officials travelling between the coast and San'a - it is worth heading up the steep, grassy slopes of Jabal Shibam towards the villages of Awman and Al'Ayn. On the slopes I have found isolated specimens of *Rosa abyssinica* as well as a goodly number of the cheery *Pelargonium alchemilloides* spp. *multibracteatum*. These species and others provide useful reminders that the flora has a strong affinity with montane Africa. *Rosa abyssinica* for instance - as its name suggests - is only elsewhere known from Ethiopia. It has large white flowers and is armed with many thorns or prickles; I'm not entirely convinced that it would hold its own in a garden setting. But what is very clear is that the Haraz is suitable for rose growing. Indeed, in the nearby Ishmaelite town of Hutayb is a small, flourishing and formal rose garden laid out with hybrid tea roses. Interestingly, in neighbouring Oman, *Rosa x damascena* is cultivated commercially for the making of rose water which is used to give flavour to halva.



Al Hajarah - architecture



Euphorbia ammak at Al Hajarah

Continuing along the Turks Road, the village of Al Hajarah is quickly reached. This village often features in tourist brochures because of its impressive fortifications and huge entrance gate – the Bab al-Husn (*Gate of the Fort*). Inside the walls, buildings jostle and elbow for room, leaving only narrow alleys and ginnels for wandering donkeys, bewildered sheep or confused travellers. Knots of small boys quickly appear to practise their English with an unrelenting tourist guide patter. Beneath the eastern town walls lies the former Jewish quarter now sadly, since the exodus to Israel, just a jumble of ramshackle dwellings and rock piles adorned by thistles. To the west there is a small market selling souvenirs for the ever dwindling number of tourists. Behind a Shiite mosque in a patch of waste ground

Solanum villosum



used predominantly as a dump, a wide range of ruderal plants may be seen. Wood cites high nitrogen levels arising from human waste as the reason for the abundance of plant species, many of which are reassuringly familiar, resembling common nettles and hawkweeds. The most striking plant however is the huge *Euphorbia ammak* (African Candelabra) which seems to be grasping the sky downwards. The introduced *Opuntia ficus-indica*, the so-called Prickly Pear, is also extremely common and is used as hedging around local homes outwith the fortified walls.



Picris

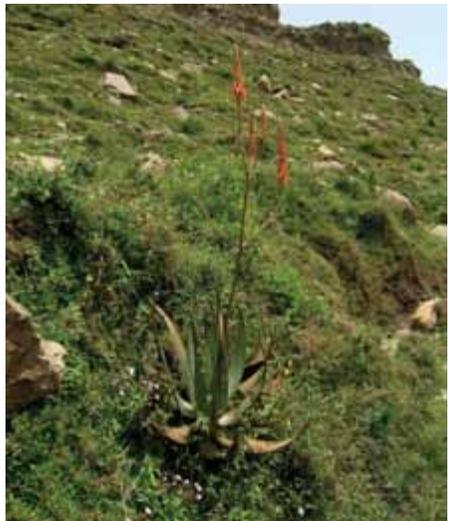
Other plants to be seen include the attractive *Amaranthus hybridus* with its tiny white flowers, the ground-hugging *Erodium cicutarium* with carrot-like leaves and magenta-mauve flowers, various *Malva* species, *Kedrostis foetidissima* with its vine-like leaves and insignificant yellow flowers, and the very attractive nettle-like *Urtica urens*. The ubiquitous *Solanum villosum*, which aligns itself with human habitation, is also present with its violet flower and red fruits. There are also bright yellow-flowered *Picris* species and a host of thistles and hawkweed relatives.

From Al Hajarah, paths may be taken westwards towards Jabal Masar. The paths negotiate the boundaries of terraces with the occasional need

Jasminum grandiflorum ssp. *floribundum*



Aloe vaccillans



to traverse small streams. In the fields, farmers, both men and women, may be seen working and, unusually for Yemen, heard singing. On some of the more inaccessible rock faces is found the delightful *Jasminum grandiflorum* ssp. *floribundum*, its white flowers falling like snow-flakes against the hillside. I have often seen it elsewhere in association with the trailing *Aloe rubroviolacea*. The escarpment also holds what is assumed to be *Aloe vacillans*, a common stemless aloe. These succulent species are fiendishly difficult to identify because of their propensity to hybridize and speciate; one accordingly is tempted simply to admire the plants and forego any identification!

On the drier slopes are large stands of *Euphorbia ammak* with their smaller spiny cousins *Euphorbia fruticosa* and the unarmed grey-green *Euphorbia schimperi*, named after Wilhelm Schimper, the Ethiopian flora specialist, who incidentally coined the phrase 'the rain forest' - a term certainly not applicable to Yemen. Another spiny plant found on such slopes is the spectacular *Echinops spinosissimus*, whose long lances extend well beyond the inflorescence giving the appearance of some nasty hand-held mediaeval weapon. In contrast to the aforementioned spines the slope is bejewelled with occasional mats of *Cichorium bottaa*, its sapphire flowers brightening even the foggiest afternoon!

To the south of Manakha is the Ishmaelite village of Al Ghabal and here in deep shade following the route of a natural drain are found large numbers of *Primula verticillata*. The growing medium is clearly favourable as the plants are large and lush, unlike other examples I have seen elsewhere in Yemen where they tended to be smaller with greater levels of meal and grew in situations that would make them true saxatiles.

Echinops spinosissimus



Euphorbia fruticosa & *E. schimperi*





Cichorium bottae

From Al Ghabal, a path leads down to the Ishmaelite shrine of Hatim bin Ibrahim al-Hamed, the 12th century spiritual leader, at the town of Hutayb. The well-tended rose garden and paved streets are completely at odds with the rugged landscape and scruffy fortified villages of the Haraz. Above the town, fan-tailed ravens (*Corvus rhipidurus*), vultures and eagles

Selaginella yemensis

Felicia abyssinica





Primula verticillata and its habitats

are seen soaring, calling and displaying. Spectacular views are afforded of Wadi Hadharayn. Numerous paths go down across huge stone slabs to the village of Bani Murrah. An exploration of the slabs can be profitable: in shaded areas are abundant ferns including the larger *Pteris* species as well as the endemic clubmoss *Selaginella yemensis*. A few clumps of *Primula verticillata* are here escaping the intense sun. In more exposed areas the daisy-like *Felicia abyssinica* bathe in the sunlight.

On the disused ground of Bani Murrah are fine examples of *Centaurothamnus maximus*, *Acanthus arboreus*, *Echium rauwolfii*, *Rumex* and *Silene* species as well as various thistles. To stop in the village for refreshment is immediately to draw a crowd of the young and the old, those of working age having left for work in San'a or elsewhere, and is an opportunity to discuss with locals possible future routes and areas for exploration.

In this short article I have sought to provide an overview of some of the geographical and floral riches of the Haraz Mountains. Space has precluded a more expansive review of the flora of the area, but it is a region to which I have returned a number of times and will continue to



do so; and perhaps there will be a future opportunity to share further flora explorations.

References

Wood J R I (1997) *A Handbook of the Yemen Flora*, Kew. At nearly 2 kg this large format book is too cumbersome to be used in the field and although comprehensive it lacks extensive illustrations.

Unfurling thistle;
Aloe;
Welcoming the Imam
at Al Ghabal



Reivers Group Discussion Weekend

28 – 30 September 2012



Following our last successful meeting in the delightfully staffed Cairndale hotel, the Discussion Weekend will be held in Dumfries in 2012. In their unique cross-border collaboration, groups north and south of the border have once again laid aside old cattle-rustling rivalries and combined as the Reivers Group to organize everything. The Reivers will run the event at the Cairndale Hotel in Dumfries from 28th to 30th September 2012. So please put it in your diary now!

Dumfries has excellent transport links: it is close to the major motorways (M74 and M6); it is served by a railway station close to the hotel; and it has direct connection with the ferry terminals at Stranraer, Cairnryan and Troon. Galloway has a range of activities to suit everyone, while Dumfries itself is steeped in history from Robert the Bruce to Robert Burns. There are numerous towns and villages around the town with delightful gardens to enjoy.

The Cairndale is a town centre hotel with the full range of facilities – a large function suite where plant sales and showing are on one level, a swimming pool and other leisure facilities. There is one bedroom fully equipped for major disabilities and there is a lift to the second floor in the main part of the hotel only. Please let us know on the booking form if you have any special needs such as a room near lifts, or other services.

A number of twin or double rooms has been made available for us but the number of single rooms is very small. If you wish to share a room please indicate the other person's name on the back of the booking form. Extra nights are available at the rates quoted on the form.

The weekend is earlier than usual so please note that the booking form and fee should be returned to Gill Lee as soon as possible and no later than 17th June 2012, which is the last date for refunds or for booking at the following prices.

The registration secretary: Mrs Gill Lee, Inglenook Cottage, The Neuk, Belford, Northumberland NE70 7NF, 01668 213925.

Resident (per person)

Friday dinner – Sunday afternoon tea, double	£198
Friday dinner – Sunday afternoon tea, single	£258
Saturday morning – Sunday afternoon tea, double	£140
Saturday morning – Sunday afternoon tea, single	£170

Non-resident

Friday evening (including dinner)	£35
Saturday - morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea	£50
Saturday - morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner	£80
Saturday - dinner	£35
Sunday - morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea	£50

Programme

Friday 28th September

- 1600 Registration
- 1600 Plant Staging (to 1730)
- 1800 Dinner
- 1945 President's Welcome Address
- 2000 The Jim Archibald Lecture: Oron Peri (Israel) – 'Bulbs of the Eastern Mediterranean'
- 2130 Small Bulb Exchange

Saturday 29th September

- 0800 Plant Staging (to 0900)
- 0830 Registration
- 0930 Workshops and Discussion groups
- 1300 Show opens
- 1330 Mark Watson (RBGE) – 'Flora of Nepal'
- 1435 Tim Lever (Aberconwy) – 'The Kingdom of Bhutan – In Search of the Pink Poppy-wort'
- 1530 The William Buchanan Lecture: Clint Callens (Belgium) – 'The Discreet Charm of Paris and Podophyllum'
- 1900 Dinner
- 2130 Plant Auction

Sunday 30th September

- 0830 Registration
- 0930 John Massey (Kingswinford) – 'Hepaticas at Ashwood'
- 1100 The John Duff Lecture: Colin Crosbie (RHS Wisley) – 'Shady Characters'
- 1330 Oron Peri – 'In Search of Plants'
- 1430 The Harold Esslemont Lecture: Henrik Zetterlund (Sweden) – 'Where the Best Plants Dwell'





The Golspie Expedition 2011

Ann and Ian Christie

We make an annual pilgrimage to Golspie, about sixty miles north of Inverness and the centre of a very tranquil area of Sutherland. We claim it is an area of outstanding natural beauty despite our friends in Inverness saying it is a hundred miles of bugger-all surrounded by another hundred miles of bugger-all. We usually stay with our son-in-law's parents in the middle of June; however, this year it was well into July before we arrived. The weather was very kind to us - sunshine nearly every day. The wild flowers are always quite special here and - apart from the joys of our relatives' company - they are the main

Balblair Wood in spring
Goodyera repens





Moneses uniflora

reason for our annual expedition, especially at Balblair Wood near the Golspie golf course. Within these woods and on the nearby raised sand dunes grow some of Scotland's rarest plants. We were indeed lucky to find a few of our favourite *Moneses uniflora* (St Olaf's Candlestick) still in flower, while at each side of the woodland path were hundreds of *Goodyera repens* (Creeping Ladies Tresses). We spent quite a time among the mighty pines of Balbair Wood and under them we found a few *Pyrola* – although only two or three flower

Pyrola at Golspie





Gentianella amarella ssp. *septentrionalis* near Little Ferry pier



Gentianella campestris near the car park at Little Ferry Pier

spikes of their delicate rounded pale-pink flowers; unfortunately our other favourite, *Linnaea borealis*, was over.

A short drive down to Little Ferry pier was followed by an immensely rewarding walk to the left along a well-worn path to a low-lying area of tufted grass. In a corner near the car park grows a magnificent colony of early purple orchids (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) with hundreds of superb magenta spikes visible from the path. We pushed on, up and over a little hill to a low-lying area, the size of a football field, where we found hundreds of four- or five- petalled starry white *Gentianella amarella* flowers; they are not perennial but many young seedlings were evident and will flower next year. Ann found a small group of *Gentianella campestris* with superb vivid blue flowers just on the point of opening.



Dactylorhiza maculata ssp. *ericetorum* at Doll

Our next destination was at Doll just north-east of Dunrobin Castle. A narrow road leads to several smallholdings and some expensive houses, and in a field at a small crossroads were hundreds of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (the Common Spotted Orchid) in several colour forms – whites, darker pinks and many pale pink. Seeing so many variations, and with a few

The field of *Dactylorhiza purpurella* near Little Ferry pier



Pinguicula vulgaris near Doll: plant and bloom



Orchis mascula near Doll



Saxifraga stellaris near Bettyhill



Little Ferry pier

Dactylorhiza maculata ssp. *ericetorum* around, I thought we must be seeing hybrids between *D. maculata* and *D. fuchsii* – but it was difficult to identify them. There were also a few wonderful rose-pink spikes of *Orchis*

At Strathy Point



mascula. Alongside the road a small stream created a wet mossy habitat for *Drosera* (sundews) with their bright red sticky leaves and *Pinguicula* with their violet-blue flowers and pale green leaves; both these flowers rely on catching insects for their nutrients.

On a subsequent day we started early and headed sixty or so miles north along narrow winding roads to Bettyhill - probably the beginning of



The Bog Asphodel, *Narthecium ossifragum*, near Bettyhill



Dactylorhiza purpurella

the second hundred miles of bugar-all. We searched the coastline with little success before lunch at Strathy Point. Here, in a very special area, almost-black Hebridean sheep graze below a magnificent lighthouse. The short-cropped grass is blessed with colonies of our tiny native *Primula scotica* in its striking shades of purple, but on this occasion only a few flowers remained for us to see. I was surprised to notice an almost tame black rabbit (the enemy of *P. scotica*), perhaps



Saxifraga aizoides

an escapee from human care. Among our other finds in the wettest areas were *Saxifraga stellaris* (the Starry Saxifrage) and *Saxifraga aizoides* beside fine golden-yellow spikes of *Narthecium ossifragum* (the Bog Asphodel), from the lily family. Scattered around the hillside in the heather and tufted grasses was a constellation of thousands of attractive Cotton-tail grass heads. We look forward to visiting Golspie again in the hope of finding yet more floral treasures.



Primula scotica A Weel-faured Scots Floorie

Davie Sharp

The Scottish primrose (*Primula scotica*), a relative of *Primula farinosa* and *Primula scandinavica*, was first found by a Mr Gibb of Inverness in 1819 on the high cliffs of Holborn Head, Scrabster, on the northern Caithness coastline. It may be found in slightly calcareous substrate anywhere along the north coast from north-west Sutherland and Caithness around to Wick and onwards to the Orkney Islands, in the areas of North Hill, Rousay, Stromness heath & coast, and West Westray. The known populations have all been growing in stony, short and sparse vegetation, managed by winter-grazing sheep and, in some cases, helpful rabbits that restrict the vegetation to around two or three centimetres or less. Only very rarely is it found in lush vegetative ground. However, I have found no plants wherever rabbit activity has been too great. A clue to its habitat is its plant association with a number of maritime lime-tolerant

indicator plants according to season: *Festuca rubra*, *Thymus praecox*, *Carex flacca*, *Succisa pratensis*, *Linum catharticum*, *Lotus corniculatus*, *Gentianella campestris*, *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Prunella vulgaris*, *Galium verum* and the semi-parasitic *Euphrasia officinalis*.

Primula scotica usually has two flowering periods in May to June and July to August; it is said to be biennial or a short lived perennial. The flowering stalk (one to six cm, sometimes taller) extends from a basal rosette (one to five cm) of untoothed and almost stalkless leaves. The stem is topped by one to six violet-red to purple flowers (one or two cm in diameter) with notched petals and a golden yellow throat that has a narrow white surround. The leaves, stalk and seed head are coated with a white to cream-coloured farina. They have the ability to self-pollinate and in fruit they can extend to a height of twelve cm or more. Some populations can number upwards of sixty per square metre, thereby raising the possibility of cross pollination and an increase in the longevity of plants - as I have found at home, where I have plants from several sources. The number of my plants that have survived for numerous years has increased in 2011, and I now have a pan of five-year-old plants.

My Way of Cultivation

Over the years I have grown *P. scotica* in various composts, such as loam-based John Innes, proprietary peat base with added John Innes, straight peat composts, not forgetting germinating in a seed-formulated compost - with varying degrees of success. All the resulting plants were

Cultivated forms of *Primula scotica*



short lived, whether pot grown or in the open garden. It wasn't until I remembered being on a training exercise with RAF Kinloss Mountain Rescue Team in North Sutherland in the early 1970s that I hit upon a more successful method. While sunbathing during that mission I was able to observe a number of colonies on the Kyle of Durness. The memory of the wee primula remained dormant in my mind's eye until it suddenly dawned on me when thinking back to the first time I had seen it, subconsciously reinforced by many subsequent sightings. I managed to acquire a piece of maritime turf, gave it a haircut, cutting the grass to approximately two cm, and laid it onto a base of gritty sand in a twenty five cm pan. I trimmed off the excess turf and watered the pan from above, using rain water with added dolomitic lime. I sowed seed from different stock thinly on the surface of the turf, giving the pot a gentle knock to settle the seed amongst the blades of grass; I then waited for germination. In due course the seed germinated and grew on to flowering, without thinning out the germinated seedlings. Five years on, they have flowered well. The rosettes vary in width and the height of the flowering plants varies; they are certainly not uniform. The only aftercare is to keep the grass short at two to three cm and to ensure that the primulas are never short of water.

I am now in the process of trying another variation. Here, I have sown seed from another source in gritty compost. I will prick the seedlings out and put them in a pan and deep seed tray containing maritime turf with mixed vegetation. Then I will sit back and see ...

I think it is fitting to finish off with a wee verse in the language that the Scottish primrose would be conversant with - in the 'Mither Tongue'. I am grateful to A Paterson for checking my Scots text.

'Stracht aheid tae the Pole' at Strathy Point in Sutherland



A Weel-faured Scots Floorie

*Tae yer left, a clear wye,
ower the watter tae Noufyland,
stracht aheid tae the Pole
an tae yeer richt the Orkney Isles.*

*An' there ye are wi yer meally fulyerie an stalk,
wi cheerie violetie-purple floories
an wee gouden een,
cooried doon amang the grasses
abeen the coastal cliffs
oot o' yon coorse saat win's.*

*Roon aboot grow auld freens like thyme and selfheal.
Yer nae too keen on heich grown girse
an like the sheep tae keep it rael low.*

*Abeen yea see the gulls fleein' shewin' fite clouds tae the sky.
Alow the cliffs the otters caper an' play in the watter.*

In a' a picter tae warm yer hairt.



This, in a rough English translation, reads:

*To your left an open way
over the water to Newfoundland,
straight ahead to the Pole
and to your right the Orkney Isles.*

*And there you are with your mealy foliage and stalk,
with cheery violet-purple flowers
and tiny golden eyes,
huddled down demurely among the grasses
on the coastal cliffs
out of the salt-laden winds.*

*Round about grow old friends like thyme and selfheal.
You're not too keen on high grown grass
and like the sheep to keep it really low.*

*Above, you see the soaring gulls,
stitching white clouds to the sky.
Below the cliffs, the otters gambol and play in the water.*

Ah what a sight to warm your heart!



Auld freens near Durness: *Thymus praecox*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* (the Fragrant Orchid, now split by DNA analysis to three species - see Butler & Crossan 'Wild Flowers of the North Highlands of Scotland') and two forms of *Dactylorhiza maculata*

Further Information

A 28 page full-colour A4 booklet, 'The Nature of Grazing', and a series of ten related management advisory notes are available free of charge from the Reserves Manager, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cramond House, Kirk Cramond, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust - Roy A. Harris and R. M. Jones. The Loft and Hill of White Hamars Grazing Project.

Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report 312, Scottish primrose *Primula scotica*. Survey in Caithness and Sutherland 2007-2008

Opposite: *Primula scotica* near Balnakeil with other auld freens: variations of *Campanula rotundifolia* & *Parnassia palustris* (Grass of Parnassus)





Leucojum valentinum

A Cool Scent in Hot Summer

Juan Fornes

September 5th. 9 o'clock in the morning. Already 29°C, and rising. A bleak landscape: dried stems, brown leaves, skeletons of past flowerings, dead looking shrubs; the end of summer is definitely not the best time to discover the botanical richness of Mediterranean lands. Animals seem absent; or dead; white snails look calcined, grasshoppers with the colour of their surrounding red sandstone seem on the point of change from animal to mineral.

Only cicadas enjoy this torrid heat, singing endlessly. Even birds, usually so striking with their behaviour and songs, have disappeared or are about to do so: small flocks of Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) are on their way south and Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) do the same, exchanging the boring hunt of European bees for the much more exciting African wild bees. Only some warblers (*Sylvia*) move like shy mice among the bushes, revealing themselves by their alert calls.

Last spring's rains are nothing but memories, autumn's are yet to come and this year's scarce summer storms might never have existed. Here, everything and everyone try to find their way to survive the long, hot and dried summer months. Plants have developed multiple strategies to pass through these bad times: annuals disperse their seeds, hoping the next generation will be lucky enough to prosper after the rains, developing as fast as they can.

Bulbs, rhizomes and tubers have been storing food and now they simply wait, resting in the over-baked soil. Some shrubs, like *Anagyris*



A near-calcined snail of the genus *Sphincterochila*
Opposite: *Cicada barbara* sings in the heat
Sunbathing grasshopper of the genus *Sphingonothus*





Chamaerops humilis berries



A mantis ootheca bakes in the sun



Sprouting stem of *Leucojum valentinum*

Fruits: *Rhamnus lycioides*

foetida, shed all their leaves now, waiting for winter to sprout and flower. Their summer look is nothing but a mass of dead branches with just a few brown pods to testify that - at least last spring - they were alive. Plants still remaining green and active try different tactics not only to survive the heat but also to avoid being devoured now that vegetal food is so scarce. A series of thorns, poisons, shield-like leaves and any other defensive weapon we can imagine is present. But in this hard and chaotic scene is a little jewel that dares to flower among the rocks - *Leucojum valentinum*. This small snowflake chooses August and September to show its completely white flowers to the rich summer

Pistacia lentiscus & *Smilax aspera*





Seeds of *Leucojum valentinum*, showing the strophiole

entomological fauna. *Leucojum* is a genus within the Amaryllidaceae family, to which the popular genus *Galanthus* also belongs - in fact, they are very close. While the latter is better represented in the eastern Mediterranean, *Leucojum* seems to concentrate its focus in the west.

Leucojum valentinum has had a convoluted history. Initially, it was described as being distributed through east Spain and north Greece, with some probable citations from Sicily. Later studies suggested changes not only at specific level but also at genus level, being transferred by some authors to genus *Acis*, and separated from its Greek and Albanian vicariant species, thereby meriting its own sub-specific status, being named *Leucojum valentinum* ssp. *vlorense*. This subspecies was finally raised to specific status and described as a different species, renamed *Acis ionica*. Thus, *Acis valentina* was recognized as an endemic in the east of Spain throughout south Castellón and the northern Valencian provinces.

Leucojum Groups

As we have seen, genus *Leucojum* as a whole has been affected by the swings of taxonomy not only with sub-specific or even specific changes, but also by segregations at genus level. Traditionally, *Leucojum* had been split into four subgenera belonging to two different groups. These two groups are melded and named as genus *Leucojum* by splitter taxonomists. A first group characterized by hollow stems and wide leaves has the widest distribution and is probably the best known to botanists and gardeners. It includes subgenera *Leucojum* (with only one species:

Anagyris foetida: seeds were used in mediaeval times to poison weapons





Seed heads and (opposite) epigynous lobes of *Leucojum valentinum*

Leucojum vernum) and *Aerosperma*, another monospecific subgenus containing the very well-known *L. aestivum*.

The second group is characterized by solid scapes and very thin or even filiform leaves. It includes subgenera *Acis* and *Ruminia*. The two subgenera are differentiated not only by the presence or absence of strophiole in their seeds (subgenera *Acis* and *Ruminia* respectively) but also by the conspicuous or inconspicuous nature of the epigynous disc lobes where the seminal filaments are inserted (again *Acis* and *Ruminia* respectively). The two subgenera have been raised to genus level by splitters, naming it *Acis*. Recent genetic research seems to move species from the genus *Galanthus* to genus *Leucojum sensu stricto* (subgenera *Leucojum* and *Aerosperma*), removing from the 'old' genus *Leucojum* the subgenera *Acis* and *Ruminia* which would thus become a genus on their own: *Acis*. A key may be contrived:

A Key

1. Stem stout, more or less hollow. Leaves 5-25 mm wide (group <i>Leucojum</i>)	... 2
Stem more or less slender, solid. Leaves thin or filiform (group <i>Acis</i>)	... 3
2. Group <i>Leucojum</i> . Flowering time winter/spring	
Flowers usually 1(2). Stem up to 35 cm long. Seeds with strophiole, whitish ... (subgenus <i>Leucojum</i>)	... <i>L. vernum</i>
Flowers usually 2-5 (rarely 1-7). Black seeds, without strophiole ... (subgenus <i>Aerosperma</i>)	... <i>L. aestivum</i>
3. Group <i>Acis</i> . Flowering time winter/spring or summer/autumn	
Inconspicuous epigynous lobes. Seeds without strophiole	... 4
Conspicuous epigynous lobes. Seeds with strophiole	... 8
4. Flowering time winter/spring	... 5
Flowering time summer/autumn	... 7
5. Leaves 4-10 mm wide, canalculated on the outer side	... <i>L. tingitanum</i>
Leaves < 3 mm wide or filiform	... 6
6. Longest pedicels exceeding spathe. Perianth segments 12-25 mm, the outer segments apiculate.	
Style slightly longer than stamens	... <i>L. trichophyllum</i>
Pedicels not exceeding spathe. Perianth segments 8-11 mm, not apiculate. Style shorter than stamens	... <i>L. longifolium</i>
7. Flowers usually 2-3. Pedicels 15-25 mm. Spathe 1-valved (sometimes bifid or, seldomly, divided lengthwise)	... <i>L. autumnale</i>
Flowers usually solitary. Pedicels up to 5 mm. Spathe 2-valved	... <i>L. roseum</i>
8. Winter/spring flowering	... 9
Summer/autumn flowering	... 10
9. Epigynous lobes up to 0.3 mm, triangular. Tip of inner perianth segments obtuse	... <i>L. nicaeense</i>
Epigynous lobes 0.6 mm, ovoid-lanceolate. Tip of inner perianth segments rounded	... <i>L. fabrei</i>
10. Inner perianth segments emarginated. Epigynous lobes 1-1.1 mm. Stem 2-3 mm in diameter	... <i>Acis valentina</i>
Inner perianth segments obtuse. Epigynous lobes 0.8-0.9 mm. Scape 0.8-1.2 mm in diameter	... <i>Acis ionica</i>



A Search

We searched three mountains within the known limits of distribution of *Acis valentina* and another two outside but with appropriate geological features. Our first mountain consisted of a powerful layer of red sandstone (called *rodno*) at the bottom, showing at the surface on east and west slopes. The southern slope was a series of cliffs with limestone on top and yellowish marls below, to where it joins and merges with the sandstone. The northern slope was composed of limestone rocks in different degrees of decomposition, leaving hollows and cracks filled with *terra rossa* from their final erosion, forming a variably deep and rich soil. It was here, on this northern slope, that we found all the specimens of *Leucojum*, albeit in small numbers - just fifteen individuals, mostly solitary, rarely in groups of two (or even three). Plants

were in different stages of development: buds; completely mature; plants with immature fruits. Stem height varied between 55 and 152 mm. The spathe, always divided in two, went from 19 to 27 mm. The perianth segments, however, showed an almost uniform size in spite of



In the maquis: flower and seeds of *Clematis flammula*





In the maquis: *Quercus robur*
and *Asparagus horridus*

differences in stem lengths: the outer were 10 to 13 mm long x 4 to 5 mm wide, and the inner 10 to 13 mm x 5 to 7 mm. That said, they were sometimes very slightly emarginated or even straight (almost obtuse). This reflects the high variability of this species seen by some other authors. Pedicels were very different in each flowered stem, from 7 to 31 mm. Most of plants had two flowers, though some had three and one even four. Very seldom were they solitary.



Although it is said that *Leucojum valentinum* prefers south-facing orientations, all the plants we found were at the upper and middle sides of the north-facing slope, no doubt avoiding the southern marls and sandstones. The vegetation here, because of the rich soil at the bottom of the hollows, was dominated by the typical Mediterranean maquis: a community of *Smilax aspera*, *Clematis flammula*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Rhamnus lycioides*, some *Chamaerops humilis* and



In the maquis: *Opuntia*

Quercus coccifera, together with some scarce carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and olive trees (*Olea europaea*) - these two latter doubtless were traces of relict crops. All these plants were scarcer as we climbed to the top, where *Anagyris foetida* became frequent; it is a plant characteristic of archaeological sites, especially those from mediaeval times, because people used its seeds to poison their weapons. This plant is also known to be pollinated by birds (mainly warblers, *Sylvia*), a most unusual feature within Europe.

The number of species decreased as we approached the top, though we found various *Sedum* species (probably *S. album* and *S. sediforme*), *Teucrium* species, *Asparagus horridus*, some *Rosmarinus officinalis* and diverse grasses. It was here, in the cracks of limestone rocks, that we found *Leucojum*. The south-facing slope was dominated by the 'alien' *Opuntia maxima* and *Pistacia lentiscus*, carob trees, pomegranate bushes, *Rosmarinus* and various legumes. On east and west slopes, both kinds of vegetation mixed in varying degrees.

Our second hill was, from a distance, geologically dominated, capped by almost pure

Urginea maritima: flowers





Hypericum ericoides

limestone. Coming closer we could see a dense population of *Pinus halepensis*, no doubt an old resettlement, covering many eroded places in the middle and at the bottom. Short in spite of their thick stems, they testified to very thin soils. Cracks in the rocks burst with very hard grasses and other strong plants such as small *Rosmarinus* and *Thymus* - surely seeking sunny places safe from the shadows of pines.

Thus, suitable places for *Leucojum* to thrive were simply non-existent. In very small cracks, almost impossible to colonize, the beautiful *Hypericum ericoides* displayed its yellow flowers. Some *Quercus coccifera* and *Pistacia lentiscus* tried to win ground from the pines, without much success. In the few places without pines, a mass of *Smilax*, *Rhamnus*, *Clematis*

Urginea maritima: seed heads



Above & facing: Aspects of *Leucojum valentinum* - detail, group & seeds

and *Pistacia* covered the land. In spite of all these challenges, two *Leucojum* managed to thrive under a half-burnt *Chamaerops humilis* stump that grew inside a big rock crack. But such adverse conditions did not affect the measurements of the plants: sizes were almost identical to those on the first mountain: 73 and 94 mm length of scape, spathe 23 mm, outer petals 11 mm x 4 mm and 11 mm x 6 mm, and inner petals 10 x 4 mm and 10 x 6 mm. One plant had a lonely flower, and the second one had one flower and two buds.

The third mountain lay within the distribution of *Leucojum valentinum* and was geologically very different: it was composed primarily of red sandstones almost from top to bottom, with burgundy soils among the rocks. Although the sandstones had big cracks, we found no

Lapiedra martinezii



Leucojum, perhaps because the geochemical characteristics were unsuitable. Its place was taken by another of the Amaryllidaceae with an almost identical flowering time: *Lapiedra martinezii*. Their scapes, with white buds crossed by a middle green stripe, began to show over the surface. Some earlier ones showed one open flower and there was even one plant with immature fruits!

On the two last mountains, outside the known distribution of *Leucojum*, we found none, as expected. However, we were surprised by two bulbous plants we had long been seeking - *Urginea undulata* and *Scilla obtusifolia*. In less



than ten square metres, more than twenty fruiting stems of the latter testified to the appeal of these flowers to their pollinators. Small leaves with characteristic wavy margins sprouted from some bulbs to confirm our identification. Our last mountain comforted us not only



Scilla obtusifolia



with magnificent views but also with some *Urginea maritima* in different degrees of development: from scapes at the very beginning, to stems with immature fruits. Some small *Allium moschatum* closed our list of flowering bulbs.

Acknowledgement

This article is dedicated to the memory of the author's mother, who loved flowers, who accompanied him on his expeditions and who died during its preparation. She is pictured here with *Achillea* and other flowers.

Opposite: wasps at work

Conclusion

The very curious thing we have noticed about *Leucojum valentinum* is that the bibliography makes no mention of the scent of the flowers: sweet and fresh, although not very strong, it was clearly noticeable in most flowers. The solid scapes were always canaliculated rather than plain and we noticed a hyaline margin in some stems, as mentioned in some texts. We were also surprised by the speed of development: in less than a month, flowers led to almost mature pods with quite well developed leaves.

Let's hope this beautiful plant will not disappear from our mountains. Urban overexploitation, mainly coastal, has undoubtedly destroyed sites formerly inhabited by this plant, and surely many other interesting ones. Large infrastructural development such as the widening of roads and forest developments of dubious legality add to the threats to European nature. Societies and clubs such as our own help make a huge contribution by spreading knowledge of such interesting places and unknown plants. These societies (in the end, all of us - their members) help understanding of the true value of our botanical legacy and teach us to love it. Let's share our hobby, ideas, thoughts, doubts, plants and seeds, making a global botanical bank useful even for institutions searching for vanished or endangered plants. But let us not be the ones who plunder nature for special, scarce or sensitive plants. Let's avoid, at all costs, becoming one of those (fortunately) rare people who pride themselves in being the only ones to have some specimen of an extremely rare species (so often at what price - and I don't mean only monetary). Let's learn to respect and love nature, or we will become a part of the problem.



Jean André Soulié – A Martyr of Botanical Science

Pavel Křivka

In the Hollywood box office success, *'Seven years in Tibet'*, a scene shows lamas moving construction works because of possible harm to earthworms. It was therefore with some surprise that some years ago I read in Backer's dictionary of etymology of plant names that in 1905 Father Soulié was tortured and later shot dead by lamas in Yargong. That was the first occasion when I conceived doubts about the popularly perceived Tibetan myth. Indeed, particularly when concerning people, there seem to have existed exemptions from the principle of *'not harming any living being'*. Investigating what Tibet was like before the present Chinese occupation, I found distressing photographs on the internet taken by European expeditions before 1950, of cripples without arms, ears or eyes (*The American historian Michael Parenti, to quote just one example, confirms the general nature of these assertions at his website <http://www.michaelparenti.org/Tibet.html>* - Ed.). The earthworms may not have been harmed but removing an eye from a peasant had been an acceptable historical experience. Old Tibet was essentially a feudal and monastery-ruled society, where the monks belonged to the governing caste while the serfs and slaves were of relatively lowly caste. Chinese communist arrangements completely cancelled the old Tibetan hierarchy, explaining some Tibetans' antipathy at that time to the government in Beijing. Contemporary notions of human rights and the myth of gentle lamas are sympathetically received by an atheistic, spiritually parched and politically uneducated western public which, during the visits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, experiences a taste of spirituality often missing from today's life. The truth is that the risks run by earlier plant hunters to bring us today's botanical delights were, as elsewhere, considerable.

In Brenda McLean's book *'George Forrest – Plant Hunter'* (2004), we can read what horrible end Father Soulié may have experienced. Forrest himself had a narrow escape in the year that Soulié was killed. In a letter to his wife Clementine, Forrest describes the end of another two French missionaries whose hospitality he had enjoyed in the village of Tsekou (Chigu) in the Mekong valley in Yunnan: *'It appears that Père Bourdonnec was cornered some time on the second day, shot down, and whilst still alive cut open and his heart torn out. Père Dubernard managed to elude his pursuers until the fourth or fifth day when he was captured. The lamas broke both his arms, tied his hands behind his back and then led him off in the direction of Tsekou. However, he became so exhausted that he begged them to kill him at once, on which one of them struck him down with a sword. He was then cut open and his heart extracted before death.'*



Cirsium souliei (Jonas Bergsten, Wikimedia Commons)

Pedicularis souliei

Both bodies were beheaded and all parts taken north. It is the custom of the natives to eat the heart and brain, and partake of the blood of their enemies (raw of course) if they have died fighting or if they are Christians. It is said to impart bravery. Such would have been my fate had I fallen into their hands'.

Jean André Soulié was born in 1858 at Saint-Juéry, north-east of Toulouse. He became a priest and in 1885, as a Catholic missionary, he set off for China. He came to Tatsienlu, a town well known to most travelling botanists and rock gardeners as Kangding. In 1891 Soulié journeyed to Yargong (as in *Androsace yargongensis*). The town of Yargong, today's Yajiang, is a settlement on the road between Kangding and Litang in the deep valley of the Yalong River (Yalong-Jiang). As well as his activity as a missionary and his botanical hobby, Jean André Soulié helped the local people as a physician, potter and charcoal producer. Before his martyr's death, he sent about seven thousand herbarium specimens from this part of Sichuan to the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Soulié was interested in zoology and left a collection of birds, mammals and reptiles for the museum. Among the plants were many new and previously undescribed species. Thanks to Father Soulié's passion for collecting, European parks have been enriched by the shrub *Buddleja davidii*. Although other French priest-botanists did not enjoy an easy life in China (Delavay almost died in Yunnan because of the Plague bacterium *Yersinia pestis*), Soulié's tortured end was perhaps one of the worst possible.

In his honour, many plant species were later named after him, especially by Adrien Franchet. Among these species belong, for example, *Synalathium souliei*, *Aster souliei*, *Cirsium souliei*, *Lilium souliei* and others. The lousewort *Pedicularis souliei* occurs commonly in the surroundings of Kangding, where Soulié lived and worked.

Yukiwariso – Subdivision in *Hepatica* Types

Gunhild Poulsen

Growing the genus *Hepatica* is a very great joy; more and more gardeners are discovering these wonderful flowers - and so did I. At first it was the European *Hepatica nobilis* var. *nobilis* (often called *H. nobilis*) that caught my interest. Perhaps I should rather say that I didn't know Japanese *H. nobilis* var. *japonica* (called *H. japonica*) at that time but that my enthusiasm grew on seeing its wonderful half- or fully-filled flowers during a fascinating *Hepatica* journey in Japan. The Japanese name for *Hepatica* is *Yukiwariso*, a *plant that breaks through the snow*, and in Japan as well as in Europe it is a wonderful harbinger of spring.

Most cultivars of *Hepatica japonica* are native to the mountain areas around Niigata on the north-western part of the main island of Honshu and to Sado Island off the coast of Niigata. This region contains most of the nurseries and growers today. Some mutated forms of hepaticas have been discovered here that offer a genealogical record for many contemporary sorts. When a group of collectors found some very unusual forms here thirty years ago, it produced a Japanese boom in hepaticas and in the following few years several hundred clones were selected and named. Now there are thousands of different sorts and every year the breeders produce new and evermore fantastic new flowers.

Cultivation

There is no great difference between the cultivation of the European and the Japanese varieties. There is some difference in the soil preferences, as *Hepatica japonica* likes an acidity of pH 5.5 to 6, whereas *H. nobilis* prefers a neutral pH 7 or more. Moreover, *H. nobilis* is more tolerant of frost than *H. japonica*. Hepaticas may be grown in pots in the greenhouse as well as in the garden.

In the garden I grow them in woodland beds together with rhododendrons and other Asian native plants. Moist beds with good drainage and humus in the shade under deciduous trees imitate the plants' normal living conditions in the wild. Shade in summer is very important or the leaves will be damaged by sunburn and the plant may even die. Hepaticas like to be fertilized - I use an ordinary garden fertilizer in spring and summer, and in autumn one containing more potassium for root development. In winter I cover *Hepatica japonica* with a plastic box with holes for air circulation. This protects from rain and ice while allowing

ventilation. *H. japonica* is said to tolerate -10° C (bare frost) and well-established plants may tolerate even more; *H. nobilis* will endure down to -20° C or more.

In my greenhouse I grow *Hepatica japonica* in pots with a soil mix of good potting compost, perlite and gravel. In March I give a long-lasting and effective fertilizer, and when repotting in August and September I apply fertilizer containing more potassium so as to encourage root development. I keep the greenhouse as chilly as possible by using nets for shade and I whitewash it a couple of times every spring and summer. It is of course important to check the plants regularly for pests and disease.

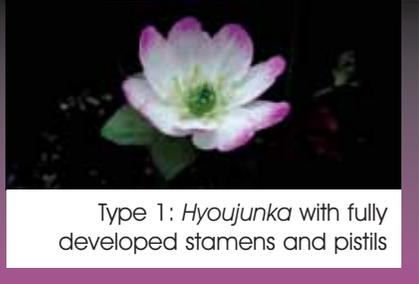
These are the main features of my way of cultivating hepaticas but probably there are almost as many different ways as there are growers; as all plant breeders know, no path is the only true path.



Subdivision in Types

Hepatica japonica consists of many different flower types and, to keep track of these, the International Hepatica Society has divided them into nine types, which I will try to explain and describe here. It can be a little difficult for Europeans to remember Japanese names but

I think it is a very good idea to learn these particular nine; when using them, there can be no doubt as to which kind of plant we are talking about. First let me say that *zaki* means *flower* or *flowering*, so that types 2 to 9 all have something to say about the flower. The nine types are:



Type 1: *Hyoujunka* with fully developed stamens and pistils

1. *Hyoujunka* is the single flower with full developed pistils and stamens. It can have any number of petals – the number matters not, as the existence of stamens and petals defines it as a *Hyoujunka*.

2. *Otome-zaki*. *Otome* means *maiden*, referring to the lack of anthers. It is a type that we also know from the European hepatica. *Otome-zaki* has no pollen although the pistils are fully developed. It follows that the only difference between *Hyoujunka* and *Otome-zaki* is the lack of anthers. When taking pollen from *Hyoujunka* it will produce seed.



3. *Nidan-zaki*. *Ni* means *two*, and *Nidan* means *two-layered*. This feature is very clear on looking at the flower, which is why this type is so named. There are simply two layers of petals: the outer layer is the normal, while the inner has mutated stamens. The inner layer comprises flat-lying petals, which may have equal or different length. It means that this group, like *Otome-zaki*, lacks the male organs whereas the female is fully developed. *Nidan-zaki* produces seed but, like *Otome-zaki*, one must take the pollen from *Hyoujunka*. It is a popular type in Japan and it can be very expensive, especially so whenever the outer petals are deep red or blue and the inner petals are white.



Type 2: *Otome-zaki* with fully developed pistils, but without stamens

4. *Nichirin-zaki*. *Nichirin* means *sun*, or a form of decoration behind Buddha. And the flower indeed resembles a sun, surrounded by a ring of short beams. The 'beams' are the mutated stamens, which are changed to short, almost cut, petals. They are layered in a well-organized ring around the fully developed pistils. It is reminiscent of *Nidan-zaki* and one can say that it is a cross between *Otome-zaki* and *Nidan-zaki*, in the sense that *Nidan* has a layer of fully developed and fully grown inner petals, whereas in *Nichirin* this layer is cut and in *Otome* it is lacking completely. They will produce seed if you pollinate them.

Type 3: *Nidan-zaki* – a fine specimen with red and white petals. The inner petals are equal and well placed





5. *Chyouji-zaki*. *Chyouji* refers to the shape of the inner petals, which compare to a garlic bulb composed of many small cloves. The mutated stamens, which are changed to inner petals, are curled and encircle the fully developed pistils. Like the *Nichirin-zaki*, it can produce seed.



Type 4: *Nichirin-zaki* look almost like *Nidan-zaki*, but the inner petals are shorter. This is 'Togunohikari-kei'

6. *Karako-zaki*. *Karako* is related to an old Chinese hairstyle. In contrast to the previously mentioned types, both pistils and stamens are mutated to straight or curled petals. This is the main rule but one may often find pistils and - if so - they should be exploited because *Karako*, an almost filled form, can produce good F1 plants for further propagation. The classification of *Karako* has recently become more comprehensive, and divides into '*Karako* without pistils' and '*Nidan-Karako* with pistils'. It is difficult to determine which plants belong to *Nidan-Karako* because the presence of pistils depends on the age of the plant. Hepaticas must grow for three years before reaching their final appearance.

7. *Sandan-zaki*. *San* means *three* - meaning that the flower of this group is *three-layered*. Both stamens and pistils are mutated to petals. The outer layer has the normal petals; the next layer has the mutated stamens, which may sometimes contain pollen. In the middle of the flower one sees

Type 5: *Chyouji-zaki* with curled inner petals. This is 'Hinamatari'





the mutated pistils, changed to petals. Because this type sometimes produces pollen, it makes it different from the others, giving the possibility of crossing two mutated types such as *Sandan* and *Karako*, which is why *Sandan-zaki* is that most wanted by present-day Japanese breeders. A good looking *Sandan-zaki* which produces pollen is very desirable in Japan, and may be very expensive. Among the European *Hepatica nobilis* this type is known as *semplena*. It is very rare and perhaps this is one of the reasons why we in Europe are not able to breed the filled or half-filled forms as the Japanese do – we simply don't have the basic material.



Type 6: *Karako-zaki* with perhaps a few pistils

Type 7: Type 7: *Sandan-zaki*, three layers of ordinary outer petals, mutated stamens, and in the middle the mutated pistils. This is from the famous Japanese breeder Kouishi Iwafuchi



8. *Senne-zaki* (or *Senju-zaki*). *Sen* means *thousand* - and that again means *thousand-layered* flower. All the pistils as well as the stamens are mutated to petals. The flower is infertile and propagation must be done by division. Many of these forms are descendants from wild collected





plants in Niigata and Sado Island. *Senne-zaki* can arise from seed, if one has the right F1 plant.

9. *Yousei-zaki*. *Yousei* means *fairy* or *pixie*. The stamens as well as the pistils are mutated to petals and the plant is infertile. It is the most recently introduced type and has traits from some of the previous ones. This type is unstable because it often - after division - loses the filled form and reverts to single flowering. This, incidentally, is a phenomenon also shown by the others; mostly they go back to their original form once they have recovered themselves. This behaviour is a natural reaction to ensure survival.



Type 8: *Senne-zaki*. All stamens and pistils are mutated to petals. This is 'Daisetsurei'

These nine types dominate but so much crossing is being done that it can be difficult to say to which type any given plant belongs. In www.hepatica.eu one can read more details on subjects such as cultivation, pest and diseases, breeding filled or half-filled flowers from seed, and the meaning of F1 and F2 plants. There are plenty of extra photos of the nine types on www.gtpoulsen.dk.

I am very grateful to my husband Thorkild for all his photographs both in this article and on this website.

Type 9: *Yousei-zaki* 'Kazenosato'



Roscoea – Robust Renegade of the Ginger Family

Grahame Ware



The Ginger family, the Zingiberaceae, is one that many adventurous gardeners are attracted to these days. And no wonder – it comprises an all-star team of exotic genera such as *Alpinia*, *Canna*, *Cautleya*, *Costus*, *Elettaria*, *Hedychium*, *Kaempferia*, *Musa*, *Renealmia* – and *Zingiber* itself. Strapping-looking darlings with a tropical habit, the Gingers are often found gracing a lovely urn or three, providing the backbone on the patios and terraces of many warm summer gardens. This botanical family also does double duty at the dining table, jazzing up our dishes not only with ginger but with cardamom and turmeric. It is very hard to imagine cuisine without their flavourful input.

The Ginger family has also spawned a robust genus, *Roscoea*, that can take harsh and variable conditions. But this refusnik disdains being just another warm-weather wonder like the rest of the clan. Thus, it has earned a place in our temperate gardens (and hearts) by being respectfully hardy and spicing them up with a much appreciated tropical flair.

Roscoea was named in 1806 to honour the enlightened lawyer, banker and MP William Roscoe, a founder of the Liverpool Botanic Garden. He was a social activist, championing prisoners' welfare and the abolition of the slave trade. *Roscoea purpurea* was discovered by Francis Buchanan in Nepal and was named by a leading early 19th century botanist, James Edward Smith.



Buchanan was a Scottish surgeon who was for a time a director of the East India Company. *Flora Nepalensis* (1825) is based on his extensive collecting in Nepal in 1802-3, with David Don doing most of the 'heavy lifting'. Buchanan (later to be Hamilton) was the first to collect in Nepal and sent a set of his plants to Smith. It was during this period that Buchanan first collected and discovered *Roscoea purpurea*. He later acceded to Leny Castle in Callander, Scotland in 1820 and to a lairdship that included the Hamilton handle. Roscoe was quite tickled at having the genus named after him and wrote to Smith '*You have done me the great and unmerited honour of annexing my name ... (for this) fine plant ... I therefore flatter myself that this nymph of the Asiatic mountains will, like a faithful spouse, retain the name imposed upon her and not, like too many of her sisterhood, elope to some more favoured admirer.*'

James Edward Smith, the Catholic son of a wealthy Norwich wool merchant and leading Dissenter, was summarily denied entry to medical schools at Oxford and Cambridge (as a non-Anglican) and thus went to Edinburgh. He later took his medical degree at Leiden (as had Linnaeus). Joseph Banks alerted him to the possible sale of all of Linnaeus's works, letters and library while they were breakfasting together. In December 1783





a letter arrived from Sweden via another intermediary, Jonas Carlsson Dryander, a boarder at Banks's house, announcing that Linnaeus's son was dead. Linnaeus himself had died five years earlier and the Linnaeus cabinet had been offered to Hooker, who valued it at £1000. The letter offered to sell Banks all the Linnaean collections – for £1000. Banks had neither the money nor the space, so asked his father for the money. Smith negotiated and acquired it for 900 guineas (£945). The cabinet included the bulk of the material from Linnaeus's widow but she retained some of Linnaeus's sons' correspondence to sell as a dowry for her daughters.

As a result of this letter the Linnaean library and material arrived at the end of October 1784 at a total cost of just under £1100. Smith set up a library, formed the Linnaean Society in 1788 and was elected its president – a role he held for forty years until death. This acquisition was a significant event that put Britain at the forefront of botanical knowledge.

I believe that *Roscoea*, like many Sino-Himalayan alpiners or woodlanders, deserves a place in every garden. It is a genus of considerable garden worthiness, transcending trendiness and not just another collector's trophy genus to be flaunted. It really shines not only in my garden but in many others in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the UK. *Roscoea* are currently the subject of an extended RHS trial at Harlow Carr. Major contributors of the 101 cultivars in the trial are: René Zijerveld of Lisserbroek, Netherlands with 29; the RHS with 22; as well as Beeches Nursery, Bressingham Gardens, Avon Bulbs, and Hugh Nunn of Worcestershire with several entries. The trial is described at www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/documents/Roscoea2008Index.pdf and it will make for horticultural clarity in sorting the species and cultivars, and in rating garden performance and merit.

History in Horticulture

It's interesting to look at some of the major garden writers in the last twenty years and see how *Roscoea* is featured and discussed. Pam Harper and Alan Armitage are just two of the leading authors whose major reference books published a generation ago did not include *Roscoea* in the plethora of possibilities for gardeners. Perhaps not so curiously, alpine gardeners were more enthusiastic and inclusive. Jack Elliot's *Alpines in the Open Garden* states '*It seems surprising that Roscoeas are not seen more often in gardens as they are easily grown and yet they look remarkably exotic, with large orchid-like flowers with a prominent lower lip and an upstanding upper petal.*' Graham Stuart-Thomas says in his still marvellous *Perennial Garden Plants* '*Though they are usually grown in peat beds, rock gardens and shady places, and appreciate coolth and humus, they (R. humeana) do not object to lime.*' He goes on to say that *R. humeana* is a

Opposite: *Roscoea cautleyoides* (Peter Coxhead, Wikimedia Commons)

Inset: *Roscoea humeana* f. *alba* (Ian Young)



Right: *R. purpurea* 'Spice Island'
(courtesy Terra Nova® Nurseries
www.terravanurseries.com)
Below: *Roscoea x beesiana*
(© John Richmond)

denizen of dry haunts and 'a most handsome species.' Jim Jermyn, in his fine book, *The Himalayan Garden*, also notes the lime-loving qualities of *R. humeana*. He observes seeing 'its root system firmly embedded in the limestone rocks, quite the opposite conditions to those of the peat garden (that most *Roscoea* are cultivated).' Chris Grey-Wilson included four species in his *A Manual of Alpine Plants* with special praise for *R. purpurea* and *R. cautleyoides*, saying of the latter that it is 'perhaps the finest and easiest species for the average garden.'

Roscoea humeana f. *alba* is described by Ian Young on the SRGC website as one of the best of all *Roscoea*. Almost all stocks derive from just two plants collected in June 1987 by the Sino-British Lijiang Expedition, under the number SBLE 636. In September 2009, it received a PC award from the Alpine Garden Society. Ron McBeath was responsible for growing and raising it as proprietor of Lamberton Nursery. The closely related *R. humeana* f. *tyria* (described by Cowley in 2000) won a Farrer Medal in 2006 and received an Award of

Opposite: *Roscoea humeana* in British Columbia. Inset: *Roscoea* 'Red Gurkha' (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)





Roscoeae 'Vincent' (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)

Merit from the AGS in 2009 while being shown by Cecilia Coller as 'Inkling' on account of its dark purple colour.

Nearly everyone who knows *R. purpurea* 'Red Gurkha' holds it in high regard but some have opined that they do not like the flowers' habit of lying on top of the foliage rather than clear of it, and have even deemed this a weakness. Others - myself included - love this feature where the flowers seem squeezed out of the stem like so many of its exotic Ginger kin. There are many seed forms of *purpurea* that are not very good and should be rogued but 'Red Gurkha' is not one of them. Undoubtedly, it is the kind of plant that will be used in a hybridizing program for its colour alone. This plant was first brought to light in the Kew Magazine (1994, 11, 3 Cowley & Baker) after the Oxford expedition (Ganesh '92) of Bill Baker, Tom Burkitt, Jonathan Miller & Rhidaya Shrestha (code BBMS). 'Red Gurkha' received a Preliminary Commendation in August, 1994 from the Alpine Garden Society. See the AGS Bulletin V 63, No. 4 pp 384-386 for more information by Tony Hall. One can expect some variability as it is a seed 'form' and not a vegetative or tissue-cultured clone.

Apparently, *Roscoeae* 'Vincent' flowers later and lasts longer than most. Paul Cumbleton in the Wisley Log on the SRGC site says it 'has



Roscoea tibetica v. *atropurpurea*
BWJ7640 (Crùg Farm Nursery)

particularly tall stems and large mauve flowers. It was at its peak in July through into August but some blooms lasted into September.'

Even fifty years ago (1963), R D Meikle wrote in his book *Garden Flowers* 'the genus *Roscoea* will thrive without protection in most districts, and, properly situated, will never fail to add a touch of distinction to the garden'. Going even further back, between the first and second world wars, we find garden writers who were smitten with the genus. Shaking the tender stereotype has not been easy for this robust renegade of the Ginger family. However, it seems its time has finally come. All in all, and particularly as emphasized by the RHS trial, *Roscoea* have most definitely

come down from the mountains and into our lowland valley beds.

Cultivation and Overwintering in Temperate Climes

Roscoea hail from the Sino-Himalayan region. They generally grow best in a humus-rich and acidic soil that is well-drained and in part shade, although *R. humeana* is lime-partial and more sun-loving. I have seen *R. cautleyoides* carpeting huge sections of abundant gravel and acidic humus in deep shady woodland north of Zhongdian in Yunnan. With regard to winter hardiness, it is a good bet that they will survive in zones 6 or 7, if given adequate drainage. Correct placement as to depth and aspect might gain a zone or two depending on the species and its provenance. In this regard, deeper is generally better - something in the order of five to eight centimetres below the surface. Little pebbles and chips heaped up around the crown will aid in drainage.

Atmospherically, lightly shaded conditions seem to be required. In his Wisley log on the SRGC website, Paul Cumbleton states '*Roscoeas* are often grown in a woodland setting but are also happy in partial sun, or even full sun in cooler parts of the country or where there is a steady supply of moisture. They like plenty of water when growing, but the



Roscoea scillifolia, black form (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)

growing medium must also be well drained as they like to be much drier during their winter dormancy - if they are too wet at this time they will rot off. They can also be grown in containers.'

All these authors agree that roscoeas are not difficult to grow and, more importantly, that they grow well. However, remember that they are slow to emerge in late spring and therefore staking to declare their place and presence is a good idea. I always follow the rule of having my wee cedar stakes on the north side of the plant. A tag slides nicely down the spine of the stake and also covers it up.

Propagation and Growing From Seed

Division is a simple way to increase one's stock and the RHS Dictionary suggests doing this after flowering. On the other hand, Graham Stuart-Thomas feels that very early in the spring when things are just coming out of dormancy is the best time when they may be '*safely divided.*' Not surprisingly, I have found that both seasons work.

Some years, with the bees on your side, a lot of seed is produced and one must stay alert to collect it. The seed pods of *R. humeana* are



Roscoea purpurea 'Wisley Amethyst' (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)

often filled with so much seed that they will provide plenty for the enthusiast or the owner of a small nursery. I have found that in good summers here on the east coast of Vancouver Island, *R. humeana* seed is often ripe by August and is best sown in early spring after all risk of frost. You also may want to plant it out straight away and cover it to protect against mice. I've had good results from both approaches.

Roscoeas germinate relatively easily from fresh seed. Deno's 70L designation (21°C/70°F and light) seems to do the trick with something in the order of 70% germination by week three. If that fails, a drop to 40°F (5°C) for 2 weeks followed by 70°F (21°C) usually sees close to 100% germination. This method is based on the advice of Norman Deno in his *Seed Germination Theory and Practice*. Even though *Roscoea* seed germinates easily, one must be vigilant through the early stages to ensure seedlings don't get too much sun - or they will fry and wither. Shade cloth and bottom heat are useful for creating even and stable growing conditions. Failing that, put them someplace where they can't get too much light or heat and let them progress slowly as they would in the wild - such as a shaded cold frame or sand plunge bed.



Roscoea 'Crûg's Late Lemon'
(Crûg Farm Nursery)

An Oread with a Dryad soul – at home in the woodland border

It seems that many great plantsmen love mountain plants and rock gardens. Indeed, there is a wonderfully anomaly with *Roscoea*. While *Roscoea* comes from the hills, it seems more at home in the woods. More like a montane woody than anything else. To put this notion within the context of Greek mythology, *Roscoea* is an Oread but has the soul of a Dryad. And, although it may be just another mountain nymph in the alps, in the woods it is a star!

Roscoea leaves are oblong to lanceolate and parallel-veined with a sessile attachment to the stem. With this plush, almost exuberant,

foliage they may not synchronize with some gardeners' sensibilities of what a neat rock garden plant should look like. But this need not be a problem if placed in the right context in the semi-shaded woodland troupe. Jack Elliott prefers '*to grow them among shrubs or in the front of the border, rather than with smaller plants in the rock garden where their lushness seems somewhat out of place.*'

In my garden they seemed to work really well with Sino-Himalayan herbaceous species of *Polygonatum*, *Smilacina*, *Disporum* and *Hosta*, along with *Epimedium* and some of the taller *Trillium* species. The vibrant deep purple of *R. purpurea* (especially when it had several flowers in bloom) echoed exquisitely with the South African annual, *Streptocarpella* 'Concord'. As for woody plants of a more compact habit, *Roscoea* works nicely with *Skimmia japonica* ssp. *reevesiana*, *Pieris japonica* var. *yakushimensis* 'Debutante' and the lovely *Leucothoë walteri* 'Rainbow'. For the loftier woodies, I would tout *Acer palmatum* 'Seiryu' and *Styrax chinensis*.

Etoliation can plague *R. purpurea* and make it lankier. This can be a

Opposite: *Roscoea* 'Vincent' (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)



little disappointing if their flowers are not equally large. This is why more and more gardeners are trending towards the shorter species and cultivars such as *R. alpina*, *R. tibetica* and others. The proportion of *Roscoea* to its neighbours then seems a little less jarring, especially over the course of a whole season.

Growing *Roscoea* in Containers

Growing *roscoeas* in containers allows one to achieve specific soil conditions and improve drainage. Perhaps it is more important to see and enjoy them when they are closer to the eye. I advise dispensing with a saucer and to look for a pot that is at least twenty cm deep. Pea gravel at the bottom and a good mix of coarse sand, fir bark mulch, a little perlite and peat (or its equivalent) make an ideal combination (ratios 3:3:2:1). To complete the container, use a little slow release fertilizer and dress with a fine stone pebble mulch. They do well for me with my liquid kelp fertilizer which is basically a fermented 'tea' brewed from local beach seaweed; a commercial seaweed fertiliser would do as well. In winter, remember to plunge the pots to the rim in a sand bed in an unheated alpine house or in a similar equivalent cold-frame or shelter.

Conclusion

All in all, *Roscoea* is one of the most exciting genera to come into wider cultivation for many years. Indeed, we may well be in the first phase of what could prove to be *Roscoeomania*! However, this is no overnight sensation, for they've been in our gardens for some time and have proved to be of lasting value. I am looking forward to the results of the RHS trials, and I am continuing to trial *Roscoea* myself. I expect the love affair to last for quite some time not only for me but the gardening public as well.

More Information

John Jeppard's excellent website has a section devoted to *Roscoea* (<http://www.johnjeppard.co.uk/plants/Roscoea/Roscoea.html>) replete with many crisp photos and unpretentious observations on a number of species. My own Owl & Stump Rare Plants nursery on Vancouver Island in British Columbia (www.owlandstumprareplants.com) is a fledgling micronursery that will have strengths in *Aconitum*, *Disporum*, woodland *Saxifraga*, *Verbasicum*, *Viola* and, yes, *Roscoea*.

Of course, a fine book on *Roscoea* is at hand – the Kew-produced *Genus Roscoea*, edited by the not-so-retired taxonomist, Jill Cowley; the hands-on aspect of *Roscoea* cultivation in the garden is written by Richard Wilford and Roland Bream. The book gives an up-to-date account of the species, as well as cultivars and hybrids in cultivation, and an extensive synonymy. It is an excellent publication with superior production values, including handsome paintings. Get this book if you really want to know what you grow.



Roscoea humeana 'Purple Streaker' (Kevin Marsh, Beeches Nursery)

A First-timer at the Discussion Weekend

John Owen

I was persuaded to add my name to the club's raffle for a sponsored place at the Discussion Weekend - for someone who had not been before. Imagine my surprise at being the winner! I'm the one who always supports raffles only to find the winning ticket is next to mine.

As the weekend approached, I felt a little nervous - I'm not confident in new social situations or large gatherings. The drive from Fort Augustus to Dumfries took my mind off things - three-quarters of the journey was through foul weather, which turned almost to tropical by the time I reached my destination. A look at the Cairndale Hotel's website had made it surprisingly easy to find; initially, the car parking didn't look too good but there was ample room at the back. Then came the bit I always find hardest - the first step into a new situation.

Being welcomed by name as I entered the foyer quickly removed that concern - the organizers and the hotel staff could not have been more friendly and welcoming. Ann Sinclair of the Reivers Group bustled about but still had time to stop and add her welcome. She mysteriously said she'd like a word once I'd had chance to settle in. I had to find my room (the hotel is a little like a rabbit warren) and meet the person with whom I was sharing. Like everyone I spoke to over the whole weekend, he was friendly and we soon became acquainted. That is one of the principal impressions I left with - members make a friendly bunch and those at the DWE were excellent ambassadors for the club.

The nine lectures ranged from very good to excellent and the huge range of topics provided something of interest for everyone. I will not list them all but, to give an idea of the variety, they included specific groups of plants (*Trillium* and *Dianthus*), Stan da Prato on *Coastal Flowers of Scotland* (Ann's 'word' had been to persuade me that I'd like to introduce that lecture). There were travelogue-type talks, Ger van den Beuken from the Netherlands on growing, Maggi Young on the excellent SRGC website and Anton Edwards's highly amusing and informative after-dinner talk on how he puts 'The Rock Garden' together (*I wish I could remember that now* - Ed.) The conference dinner followed by Anton made Saturday evening as enjoyable an evening as I can bring to mind, but it wasn't over yet. Margaret Young took the microphone for the raffle draw (as expected, I won nothing). We all know how dry a draw can be, but not when this lady is involved! She added another half hour of often almost hysterical laughter to the proceedings. My raffles aren't a patch on hers!

The associated show was fairly small but, as with all the SRGC shows I have visited, some outstanding plants were displayed. Just another

example of how our members don't do second best.

The other main event was the visit to the *Garden of Cosmic Speculation* on Saturday morning. It would have been a serious mistake not to register for it. Although not a plantsman's garden, it is a design structure that leads from area to area with new revelations on a grand scale round every corner. All of the features are linked and show a phenomenal depth of thought in their conception and development. It is a staggering example of lateral thinking with constructions in at least three dimensions everywhere you turn. Our thanks must go to the head gardener Alistair Clark for our tour, his knowledge of the concepts and their practical details, and his ability to explain them. Thanks also to the owner of Portrack House, Charles Jencks, for welcoming us and talking to us on two occasions, giving us amiable insight into the thinking behind the features. A morning there was just not long enough.

The weekend was not a blur taken at breakneck speed; one of the joys was the time we had to socialize and meet new people; some friendship groups were evident but they did not preclude the extension of the hand of friendship to someone new. You could sit at a table for a meal with people you had never met before and not feel isolated or alone. Something of which I feel SRGC members should be proud.

Ann Sinclair cannot be allowed to escape with just a brief mention; her energy over the weekend, with organisational support from the Reivers Group, made it the success it surely was. Ann began by announcing that if there were problems or things went wrong, she would take all the blame. It must have been reassuring and a relief to her to reach Sunday teatime with the only hiccup of which I was aware, the late arrival of the coach on Saturday morning, being quite beyond her control. The organisation left nothing to be desired. I am sure that all who attended wish me to express our sincere gratitude to Ann and her team for a thoroughly enjoyable weekend.

I will certainly be applying for a place next year and to those of you who haven't made your minds up to attend or not, I unreservedly recommend that you do. Finally, I express my thanks to the club for my sponsored place - you have won another convert. I'll be back!



Audrey Leach's inspiring *Shortia uniflora* var. *kantoense*

Dumfries 23rd - 25th September 2011

From Cassells Dictionary: *Reive, Rever, Reave; to take away, or from by force; to deprive of by force, to bereave, to pillage, to ravage.* This Reivers group (however you spell it) did none of the above but provided a splendid Discussion Weekend under the chieftainship of Ann Sinclair. The hotel's efforts seemed to please everyone. It certainly provided a fine hall for the show under the astute guidance of our show secretary Jennifer Watson and her husband Derrick. It was a display to provide many delights.

The first to catch our eye was a welcome splash of yellow from Jean Wyllie's *Sternbergia lutea* – two full pots of them. As usual, Harvey Shepherd's trio of ferns induced 'a green thought in a green shade' (Andrew Marvell, *The Garden*). They included a fresh *Athyrium felix-femina* 'Cristata'. Staying with ferns, your reporters staged an warhorse of many shows, *Cryptogramma crispera*, while another old veteran that has done us proud in the silver foliage class is *Celmisia longifolia*. More colourful was Beryl McNaughton's Forrest Medal winning *Gentiana* 'The Caley' in a full

Above: *Gentiana* 'The Caley' (Beryl McNaughton)

Celmisia longifolia (Shelagh & Brian Smethurst)

Sempervivum arachnoideum





Asteranthera ovata (Margaret & Henry Taylor)

and even pot. But there was more from Beryl - two gentians were awarded a red sticker; one a double *Gentiana* 'Eugens Allerbesten'. Double flowers are not to everyone's taste but we ourselves enjoy them.

Back to foliage: a fine specimen of *Shortia uniflora* var. *grandiflora* was shown by Carole and Ian Bainbridge; we also enjoyed three *Coprosma*, including *C.* 'Evening Glow' and *C.* 'Pacific Sunset'. Then a couple of good *Sempervivum*: *S. arachnoideum* and *S.* 'Rubin'. These were some of the many and varied exhibits that Stan da Prato, the Mary Bowe

Coprosma petrei x *brunnea* (Brian Davidson)





Gentiana 'Eugens Allerbesten'
(Beryl McNaughton)

Trophy winner (for most points in Section 1), usually provides at shows. Also, demonstrating his versatility, Stan showed three fine gentians. For us, one plant that really stood out was the unusual and well presented *Asteranthera ovata* from Chile that was shown by Margaret & Henry Taylor ... who know a thing or two about plants ...

Sadly for all, Glassford Sprunt was unable to attend the discussion weekend but he sent along three cyclamen for us to enjoy - *Cyclamen graecum* and two *C. mirabile*. Someone else who can grow cyclamen is Sue Gill, and her *C. mirabile* was particularly lovely this year. And regarding cyclamen - who better than Sandy Leven to win the James Lever Memorial Trophy with his *Cyclamen africanum* JCA original?

Other trophy winners this year were Audrey Leach who collected the East Lothian Cup for her *Shortia uniflora* var. *kantoense* in Section 2. In the same

Cyclamen africanum, JCA (Sandy Leven)



Crocus hadriaticus

section was a good looking compact *Pinus leucodermis* 'Schmidtii' that won the J L Mowat Trophy for best conifer in show for Ann Sinclair. It was a pity that there were some empty classes in Section 2 - Oh for more exhibitors! Congratulations therefore to Judy Humphreys whose first attempt elicited a red sticker with two conifers - *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Kosteri' and *Juniperus communis* 'Repanda'.

Finally - there were lots of superb and inspiring photographs to look at. The competition winner was that photographer *par excellence*, the amiable Peter Maguire, who also grows good plants.

So well done Reivers and all the others involved - the shrewd judges and the knowledgeable entertaining speakers. What a jolly crowd. What a grand weekend. And more in prospect in September 2012!

Brian and Shelagh Smethurst





Newcastle 8th October 2011

The Ponteland show had new (joint) show secretaries this year and they took the opportunity to revise the show schedule. This certainly stimulated interest amongst the exhibitors and there was an exceptional number of plants to be staged, especially after such a trying year for growers.

Notable by their absence were significant numbers of gentians, with just three small pans entered, while large cyclamen were also thin on the ground. Those large cyclamen that were present, such as the *Cyclamen graecum* ssp. *anatolicum* shown by Bob & Rannveig Wallis, were patchy in their flowering. Examples of *Cyclamen hederifolium* were also hard to find but Mala Janes exhibited a very neat example of one of the newer 'Ruby' forms that are becoming available. Gentians are usually one of the mainstays of the flowering sections of the autumn shows but fortunately there was a good range of crocuses, with a particularly fine potful of *Crocus serotinus* shown

Above: *Pyrethrum leontopodium* (Alan Newton)
Right: A Forrest Medal and an Award of Merit for David Boyd's *Nerine humilis*
Below: The Group's display





Saxifraga fortunei var. *rubrifolia* (Tom Green)

by Don Peace catching my eye.

My first impression of the show was generally that bulbs were also a little thin on the ground but this was not actually the case as there were some hidden gems scattered around, although two in particular were anything but retiring. Darren Sleep grows a good number of South-African bulbs; one of his exhibits was a striking example of *Gladiolus carmineus*, a spectacular and shocking reddish-pink member of the Iridaceae, with large (5 to 6 cm) blooms held 30 to 40 cm aloft on delicate stalks, which made photographing the plants something of a challenge. Apparently this plant only flowers in alternate years for Darren, so we were lucky that it timed this year's appearance for our show. The other stunning South-African bulb of the show was a large potful of *Nerine humilis*, shown by local member David Boyd, which won him the Forrest medal as well as being awarded an Award of Merit – a very popular result.

Class 90, the Fruiting Class



One of the new classes was for Gesneriaceae, which attracted five entries of the currently popular genus *Petrocosmea*, the winner being *Petrocosmea sericea*, shown by Alan Newton. Another innovation this year was the class for five examples of alpine plants in fruit, cone or seed, although it was the more established class of six varieties of alpine flowers in vases that attracted my attention, where Helen Kidman's winning entry included a vase of flowers of *Eritrichium canum*; how she managed so many flowers from this difficult plant and at this time of the year is little short of miraculous.

As it was autumn, a good number of plants showed various berries, fruit, and autumnal colours. Among the berried plants, they varied from the subdued but delicate hues of *Coprosma petrei* x *brunnea*, shown by Trevor & Angie Jones, to the eye-catching red of *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* 'Red Candy' shown by Anne Vale. The brilliant scarlet fruits of the latter plant almost looked to have been individually polished – I assume that they hadn't, for this would be taking things too far!

Of course one always expects that the major part of an autumn show will be a range of foliage classes and there was a large number of entries here, ranging from the fresh foliage of the many ferns entered, such as Brian Russ's *Polypodium australe* 'Cambricum Wilharris' to the serried ranks of

Gladiolus carmineus (Darren Sleep)





cushion plants. There were indeed so many entries in the small cushion plant classes that I expected it to cause the judges some challenges, as indeed it proved to do. Silver-foliaged plants are often contentious as some are decidedly greener than others. However, there could be no arguments about the Himalayan *Pyrethrum leontopodium* which has become popular in recent years; two fine examples were staged and Alan Newton's plant is pictured here. Another spectacular silver-foliage plant was John Bunn's *Townsendia spathulata* 'Cotton Ball', which was part of his three-pan entry but looked more like a cactus than a member of the Asteraceae. The Millennium Trophy for the best foliage plant in the show also went to a 'silver' - a spectacular potful of *Celmisia longifolia* shown by Brian and Shelagh Smethurst.

Year-round constants amongst the foliage classes are the Crassulaceae, which often get overlooked when shown alongside the 'gaudy' flowering plants of spring and summer, but there are some excellently grown specimens on the show benches and they can be appreciated better at the autumn shows. Ron and Hilary Price's *Sempervivum ciliosum* var. *borisii* was particularly attractive and, in close up, again looked very like a soft-spined cactus.

Three of the many well-grown plants on display were awarded

Vaccinium vitis-idaea 'Red Candy'
(Anne Vale)



Townsendia spathulata 'Cotton Ball' (John Bunn)

Certificates of Merit for their exceptional standard: the aforementioned *Coprosma* hybrid, Tom Green's large *Saxifraga fortunei* var. *rubrifolia* which was covered with a shimmering mass of white flowers, and *Empodium flexile* from Bob & Rannveig Wallis, which also received an Award of Merit from the RHS Joint Rock Garden Committee. This latter plant, a large potful of butter-yellow flowers, had an odd scent - not perhaps the most pleasant but certainly better than an equivalent potful of *Fritillaria* would have been.

Thanks are due to the two Alans (Furness and Newton, the joint show secretaries) and their helpers for organizing such a magnificent show as a climax to yet another awkward growing season for exhibitors. And finally, the smallest and perhaps the neatest plant in the show was

Sempervivum ciliosum var. *borisii* (Ron & Hilary Price)





Oxalis perdicaria 'Cetrino'

Christine Boulby's perfectly presented *Primula scotica*, with one small plant nested like a small jewel amongst a mossy topdressing – it attracted a lot of well-deserved interest.

Peter Maguire

Petrocosmea sericea
Primula scotica



Glasgow 7th May 2011



Ah yes ... 2011... the International Dimension! Conveyed especially in the eighth such global gathering of the great and the good of the alpine fraternity held only a fortnight previously in Nottingham. But here also on the show benches there was a tangible internationalism that pervaded the exhibits more so than in recent years. The unseasonably warm weather we had enjoyed in April led to a wonderful gallimaufry of strange bedfellows and uncharacteristic juxtapositions from all the continents – we were the ultimate benefactors of Nature’s perversity although I wouldn’t have taken bets on April not being our Summer (it was). And to continue my international theme: a group of forty-three Danes descended on Milngavie Town Hall and, in all truth, graced the show with their presence. There was a real buzz and felicitous excitement in the bursting-at-the seams hall that continued throughout the day and, since the Danes were buying almost every plant available, broad smiles on the faces of nurserymen that continued into the next. Their departure, topsy-turvy Viking style, had all the hallmarks of a retreat from Valhalla.

Usually, at this point in the proceedings, the show author describes the predominant impression, the overall theme and unifying principles in the show benches. On this particular Saturday I’ll be hanged if there were any... so it is pretty much a case of occasional stops at the highlights and thankfully there were plenty of those.

First stop: the Forrest Medal plant was a large and beautiful *Daphne calcicola* grown by Cyril Lafong (Glenrothes). This was the typically yellow-flowered version of the species that Cyril had procured from Ger van den Beuken a few years previously and grown on in a mixture of John Innes no 3, grit, composted bark, perlite and peat. Compared with a *D. petraea* it is faster growing but the scent is, let’s say, not quite as agreeable.

Above: Cyril Lafong’s Forrest Medal winning *Daphne calcicola*



Linum boissieri

Another heavyweight in the Glenrothes stable was a venerable (sixteen year old) pan of *Lewisia leana alba* which was a real contender for the Forrest but had to settle for a Certificate of Merit. Conventionally grown in a mix of J1 no 3, grit and humus, it is quite an achievement to get a plant as old as this although its age only magnifies the density of small white flowers that froth and dance in a hemisphere all around the cushion. A delight! His *Raoulia mammillaria* and *Linum boissieri*, one an unflowered silver cushion and the latter a yellow-flowered one, were both testaments to his skill and helped him win the trophy for new, rare or difficult alpinists.

For me, an absolute standout plant on the bench was a mighty pan of *Paris quadrifolia* exhibited by Margaret & Henry Taylor (Invergowrie). With none of the colourful resonance of the *Daphne* or the *Lewisia* it's a mystery of aesthetics how such a ... well ... plain green plant can command such attention. But it does! This quiet, self-effacing woodland beauty is related to the *Trillium* and is found throughout parts of Europe; being native to Scotland it gained the Taylors the Ian Donald Memorial Trophy as well as a Certificate of Merit. Trilliums proper were represented by only a few species, namely *Trillium grandiflorum* and its double form (Jim & Janet Paterson, Steven McFarlane), *T. luteum* (John di Paola, Peggy Anderson) and

Margaret & Henry Taylor's *Paris quadrifolia*





Trillium luteum

the best of the bunch – a well flowered pan of *T. pusillum* (Cyril Lafong).

Moving on to the multi-pan classes reflects a minor triumph of sorts: for once there were entries in all the classes A, 1 to 4. Since they all carry awards and trophies I didn't have the dubious honour of carting home unclaimed silverware. Class 4, 3 pans Rhododendron, is as good a place to start as any. This class and its associated Edward Darling Trophy was won by Stan da Prato (Tranent) for his trio of rhododendrons, the best being the deep pink 'September Song'. Stan also won class 1 and the Dr William Buchanan Rose Bowl for an unusual (some might even say *controversial*) six pan entry of pristine ferns. Stan is a show secretary's dream because his entries are measured by the van-load, he exhibits at all shows and he comes up trumps every time. The Tranent moniker is

Trillium grandiflorum 'Flore Pleno'





Stan da Prato's *Menziesia polifolia* 'Spring Morning'

John di Paola's *Incarvillea delavayi*



becoming ubiquitous; to convey a flavour of its presence, here are some of his other benched treasures: *Celmisia allanii*, *Sempervivum* cultivars aplenty, *Menziesia cilicalyx* x 'Spring Morning', *Picea glauca* 'Tiny', *Picea abies* 'Little Gem', *Cytisus decumbens*, *Silene uniflora*, *Leucogenes leontopodium*, the strange *Calocephalus brownii*, *Berberis thunbergii* 'Atropurpurea Nana' - and so forth. It is little wonder that he took home the Crawford Silver Challenge Cup for most points, Section 1.

Stella and David Rankin (Lasswade) are always staunch supporters of the Glasgow show both as nurserymen and exhibitors. They outdid themselves on this occasion, winning three awards outright and sharing the Don Stead prize for the most bulb points. Not for the first time the Joan Stead Prize (for best primula) was awarded to them for *Primula reidii*, a beautiful but difficult



John di Paola's *Erigeron chrysopsidis* 'Grand Ridge'

Jim & Janet Paterson's
Epimedium grandiflorum 'Lilafee'



member of the soldanelloides group with the most musky of scents. Elsewhere they showed stunning pots of the insectivorous *Pinguicula grandiflora* (the moss dressing was itself an object lesson in how to exhibit a plant), *Lewisia* 'Little Peach' and *Incarvillea mairei*, helping them to garner the Jubilee Award and the Henry Archibald Bowl. The Rankins also shared the Don Stead prize with Jim & Janet Paterson (Dundee) for whom this was their first outing to the Glasgow show. With plants such as *Epimedium* 'Lilafee', *Calanthe tricarinata*, *Fritillaria camschatcensis* and *Dicentra* 'King of Hearts', Jim & Janet will always be welcome back to the Dear Green Place.

John di Paola (Glasgow) is a local member whose entries have got stronger and more varied over the years. His *Aquilegia canadensis* was an elegant, medium sized columbine with distinctive bicoloured flowers of red (sepals) and yellow (petals) which regularly takes its place on the Glasgow benches. By contrast, the season's vagaries allowed us to view one of the finest yellow daisies, John's *Erigeron chrysopsidis* 'Grand Ridge', which would be more likely to turn up at Aberdeen. Similarly, Sam Sutherland's (Kincardine) excellent

three pan entry (in class 2) comprised *Eriogonum ovalifolium*, *Astragalus utahensis* and *Globularia bellidifolia*, all of them plants which would be ear-marked for an Aberdeen airing in a normal year. Best orchid in the show was won by Graham Catlow (Edinburgh) with *Pleione* 'Fuego' carrying some twenty flowers of a medium lilac hue. A quirk in the schedule allowed another orchid, Bob Meaden's *Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin*, to take the 75th Anniversary Award for best small pan in the show. Yet again Section 2 was rather depleted but Dr Dai Davies rose once more to the challenge and took the Wilson Trophy for the most points.

If anything, the RBGE's exhibit was even bigger and better than usual and the picturesque panoramic backdrop complemented the plants perfectly. Among so many beautiful plants the ones that made my pulse quicken were a first class *Fritillaria camschatcensis* 'Aurea' (the yellow form of the Black Sarana!), *Delphinium luteum* and, of course, the Onco irises, *Iris acutiloba* ssp. *lineolata* and *I. iberica* ssp. *elegantissima* whose bizarre and sumptuous beauty always commands admiration. Many thanks to John, Elspeth and Struan for their hard work, expertise and



Jon di Paola's
Aquilegia canadensis

Sam Sutherland's *Globularia bellidifolia* 'Hort's Form'





Podophyllum delavayi

attention to detail in bringing and erecting the display that the public never fails to admire and soak up. The judges too were equally impressed and duly awarded a Gold Medal. And although we won't see the RBGE next year – they're taking a well-earned sabbatical – Glasgow will be delighted to welcome them back in 2013.

Bob Meaden's *Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin*



Lest we become too obsessed with Forrest & Gold medals, trophies & firsts - welcome and deserving as they are - we must never lose sight of the 'show' aspect of the show nor the fact that it just might be a wonderful day out for some. Thankfully, this was a well attended and memorable show and I know that some of the merely curious went on to take out memberships - but this is what it is all about: the cognoscenti and the newcomer can debate the merits of a *Daphne* or a meringue in the tea-room or the show hall and thereby reach new insights.

Big thank-yous all round! To the judges: Brian Burrow, David Riley, David Millward, Fred Hunt, Sandy Leven and Cyril Lafong. To Anne Bush and all her helpers in the tea-room who are the dynamo of the whole event. To Alison Ward and everyone who helped out on the club plant stall. To all the stewards who set up and dismantled the tables, who moved pots and did door duty. To Glassford Sprunt for his photographs. To all the exhibitors without whom there is no show! To Liz Mills who handed out the prizes. To the nursery folk and the RBGE. And to Bill Robinson, my assistant, who works tirelessly behind the scenes. I look forward to seeing you all next year.

John Lee

Graham Catlow's *Pleione* 'Fuego'





Hexham 26th March 2011

The day dawned wet and drizzling as we drove to the show and I wondered, after what had been a very trying winter, just what kind of show it would be. *En route*, the drizzle hung in the air bathed in eerie light as though it were wrapped around everything like a yellow blanket. The weather gradually cleared and as time went on I began to realise that in fact there was an absolute welter of plants, looking stunning in great and glorious variety; I need not have been concerned after all. In fact, there were so many noteworthy plants that it is not possible to include them all here, although they helped to set a fine example of the grower's craft for the members and public alike.

One of the first plants to be seen on entering the show was in class 1 as part of the large six pan exhibit - *Paraquilegia anemonoides*, shown by Ian Kidman. For me this is always an iconic plant, with its delicate dissected leaves and, for its size, impossibly large pale-blue flowers that wave in the breeze. Its tenacity in the wild is most impressive and, having seen it growing in quantity in Central Asia as a chasmophyte, it was

Above: *Paraquilegia anemonoides* (Ian Kidman)
Hacquetia epipactis 'Thor' (Ian Christie)

Primula 'Broadwell
Milkmaid' (Cyril Lafong)





Soldanella 'Spring Symphony'

surprising also to find plants growing on flat and level ground, fully exposed to all weathers, often blasted by cold winds, even in summer. In class 3, Ian Christie's large pan of *Hacquetia epipactis* 'Thor' showed that it could look just as smart as its all-green cousin and that, given a little shade and moisture, it also grows well much further in the south of the country. Cyril Lafong's spectacular plant of *Primula* 'Broadwell Milkmaid' in class 7 was awarded a Farrer Medal, well deserved for the gleaming white mound of near-perfection. I can well remember our much-missed Kath Dryden telling me years ago that the Farrer or Forrest plant at a show is the '*one that goes past you*'; what she meant was that it was such an impressive plant that as it went by for staging it caught your eye and turned your head, which was exactly what happened here! In class 15 was a fine pan of *Pulsatilla vulgaris* 'Rode Klokke' shown by Robin Pickering with excellent large flowers of a rich pink above bright green foliage, and very different from many *vulgaris* forms. In the following class 16 was a

Saxifraga x edithae 'Karl Stivín' (Peter Hood) *Draba longisiliqua* (Barry Winter)



To Rear: *Pulsatilla vulgaris*
'Rode Klokke' (Robin Pickering)

Foreground: *Iris winogradowii*
(Ian Christie)

Below: *Primula elatior* ssp.
meyeri (John Richards)



superb plant of *Saxifraga*
x edithae 'Karel Stivín',
with its little creamy-
yellow flowers atop
claret-coloured stems
and looking quite
elegant, shown by Peter
Hood. A lovely neat plant,
it seems now not to be
seen very often around

Dionysia 'Monika'

Primula scotica (Tim Lever)





Left: *Fritillaria gibbosa*
(Alan Furness)

Below: *Pulsatilla vulgaris*



the shows.

Among the bulbous plants in class 21 was Ian Christie's magnificent plant of *Iris winogradowii*, the pale-lemon blooms virtually filling the whole pan with their pristine beauty - something that doubtless took many



Douglasia nivalis

Androsace muscoidea



years and lots of patience to achieve. In the same class were Carole and Ian Bainbridge's *Narcissus rupicola* ssp. *watieri* 'Abaleish' - a beautiful crystalline white and a robust form of this much-coveted Moroccan narcissus, also Jean Wyllie's *Narcissus* 'Betty Mae', both beautifully and - I'm quite sure - painstakingly grown. As someone who lives where some of these little gems find conditions slightly too warm at times it always helps to be able to aspire to such fine examples of their kind. Another plant that also needs cool conditions in order to grow well was *Primula scotica*, shown in class 27 by Tim Lever from Aberconwy Nursery. As a Scottish native, this diminutive and perfect little treasure, with its tiny mauve flowers, needs to be regularly replenished from the abundant seed it produces. Sadly for me, shortly after germination it has a tendency to commit suicide as the flowers fade, with no viable seed set. In class 30 was its much larger cousin, *Primula elatior* ssp. *meyeri*, the Turkish Oxlip, shown by John Richards. This was a fine plant with flowers of rich, luminous purple, one much-coveted by primula enthusiasts and not that easy to grow.

There were many excellent examples among the cushion plants on display, including a substantial and very neat plant of *Draba longisiliqua* in class 41, shown by Barry Winter. It seems that good air movement all the time, especially during damp winter weather, is important for maintaining these splendid plants.

An unusual plant in class 99 was *Oresitrophe rupifraga*, shown by Alan Newton. This Chinese plant is a smaller and daintier relative of *Bergenia* and prefers moist shade if it is to do well. Two fine examples of the genus *Fritillaria*, both in class 106, were Alan Furness's *Fritillaria gibbosa* - a magnificent potful, the best plant in a 19 cm pot, and Ian Leslie's *Fritillaria crassifolia* ssp. *poluninii*, an exquisite little plant for which patience is its own reward, but slightly easier now that there is more seed in circulation.

So many great plants were shown on the day and this is just a glimpse of some of them. If I have whetted your appetite, come next time!

Angie Jones

Primula allionii 'Ken's Seedling'



Dionysia viscidula





The Forrest Medal winner at Aberdeen was a large pan of *Paris quadrifolia* from Margaret & Henry Taylor. A slow-growing perennial herb spreading mostly by rhizomes rather than by seed, it is seldom seen at this size and took the eye of the judges. The plant is known in various areas of calcareous soil in Britain but does not seem to demand this condition in its Scottish distribution or in cultivation. Named for the fact that its parts (Latin *pars*) are equally arranged in four leaves and so forth, it differs from the Trilliaceae in that those plants commonly have their parts in threes. The plant, variously held to be in Trilliaceae and Liliaceae, is currently listed as being in the family Melianthaceae. It has been a while since the Taylors won a medal at Aberdeen so that was another attractive feature of this stately plant's success. In a year when the season has been both early and disturbed by bad weather, there were more than the usual numbers of 'green' plants on the show benches in Aberdeen and so it was apt and fun that this largely green species topped the charts.

Entries were somewhat down, as expected after the daft season we had experienced in Scotland, with early spring weather veering from scorching to freezing in see-saw fashion. Nevertheless the overall display at Aberdeen on the 21st May 2011 was more colourful than the show secretaries had dared to hope. No show can be a success without entries so all exhibitors were warmly welcomed, with two of our previous



Paris quadrifolia (Margaret & Henry Taylor),
and in antiquarian form (left)



presidents seen meeting each with other a huge Aberdonian hug. Staging is always a busy time; we are fortunate to be able to stage on Friday evening as well as on the morning of the show but there was, as always, a last minute flurry of activity.

The judges soon got down to work: John Mitchell, Sam Sutherland and Bette Ivey were shadowed by our President Liz Mills. Judges John Lee, Jean Wyllie and Glassford Sprunt began their work in Section II, which is usually gratifyingly well supported in Aberdeen. We are happy to have a good entry in this section each year

Trillium grandiflorum 'Flore Pleno'





Isobel McWilliam's *Celmisia*

- something very important for the future of our shows. There were excellent plants in this section. Some of the highlights were the *Trillium grandiflorum* 'Flore Pleno' from Glenn Gordon (in a large if slightly grubby and broken pot!) that won the Aberdeen Quaich for the best plant in the section for the second year. Glenn was unable to attend the show but his wife kindly struggled in with this unwieldy burden; it was surely worth her effort.

Section II was hotly contested with some real crackers such as a handsome pot of *Arisaema triphyllum*. Isobel McWilliam showed a fine *Celmisia*, probably *C. spectabilis*, lifted from the open ground, while Lois Thompson included an ice-white *Primula sieboldii* in her entry. Graham

The Brian Bull Trophy:
Cypripedium 'Aki' and *Aster*
souliei (Angela Townsley)

Podophyllum 'Spotty Dotty' (rear),
P. 'Kaleidoscope' (left),
P. delavayi (right) (Jim & Janet Paterson)



Catlow from Edinburgh brought a super entry to the section and narrowly missed out on a Bronze Medal.

The winner of the Brian Bull Trophy was Angela Townsley for her *Cypripedium 'Aki'* and *Aster souliei* (but at what cost? ... see Pavel Křivka's article in this issue). Angela is a prime cog in the Aberdeen show team and was so busy in the kitchen all day that it was quite late in the proceedings when she discovered her good fortune and the fact that she had also bagged a Certificate of Merit in Section I for her *Cypripedium macranthos*.

It was hard for members of the busy Teas Team to escape their workplace to see the show but we hope they all managed a quick look round. There is always a great deal of work to be done to produce a show, and not only by the wonderful growers who must tend and prepare their plants and travel to the venue. The team needed to assemble and dismantle the components and 'man' the various tasks is vital to the well-being of the show. The volunteers who give so generously of their time to help are worth their weight in home-made cakes. What a pity it is so hard to find someone to write the show reports!

Once the judges have finished their deliberations the show is open to all to see the plants and form their own opinions on the results. It's nice to see the audience making the effort to colour coordinate with the exhibits, as seen here with Lisa Lawrence's coat and a bright *Lewisia*. More seriously, a jump to Section I took us to two large and pretty saxifrages with a contrast not in colour but in form. One, a particularly tight cushion of *S. cebennensis*, was awarded a Certificate of Merit for grower Nick Boss. This French saxifrage has neat and sticky foliage and was in beautiful condition. Three fine pans of podophyllums were displayed by Jim & Janet Paterson from Dundee; they had a great day with lots of wins for their plants. However, the Patersons were pipped to the trophy for most points in the section by Stan da Prato, who managed an extra ten points to win

Cypripedium macranthos
(Angela Townsley)



Silene hookeri ssp. *bolanderi*
(Cyril Lafong)





Colour coordination: Lisa Lawrence's coat and *Lewisia*

the Walker of Portlethen Trophy - yet again. Our local convenor, Mike Hopkins, showed an *Erigeron leiomerus*. This cheery daisy was awarded a Preliminary Commendation from the Joint Rock Committee. *Rhododendron* 'Maruschka', a Hachmann evergreen azalea hybrid, which I am told has splendid autumn colour, was shown in this section by Graham Catlow and won him the Simpson Salver for the best rhododendron in the show.

Eriogonums are having a resurgence of popularity lately. *Eriogonum ovalifolium*, having been awarded a Preliminary Commendation as far back as 1952, won a Cultural Commendation for Sam Sutherland from Kincardine. Cyril Lafong was in good form as ever, and won the Esslemont prize for three pans new, rare or difficult ... again!

We were once again fortunate that the Alpine Department of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, in the form of John Mitchell and Elspeth MacKintosh, ably assisted by Struan Harley, brought a display of plants. Next year they will not be displaying at shows, so as to enable them to concentrate on the work needed to commission the new alpine house (a project that the SRGC has been pleased to support financially – please see page 117), so it was a fine temporary send-off when the display was awarded a Gold Medal.

As usual, in spite of all the work, or perhaps because of it, the time seemed to pass very quickly. As the day advanced, there was not much left on the Club Plant Stall. A successful day all round, then!

There are extensive photograph collections on the internet from this and all the SRGC shows, but the real thing is even better than my enthusiastic account and the internet imagery so, if you are able, come to the shows and see for yourself!

Margaret Young

Before the plant sale ...



Go West, Young Man: Part I



Graham Nicholls

'Go west, young man...' was Ev Whittemore's comment on the evening of Saturday May 24th 1980, *'... it's a different world'*. That was the start of something that has lasted for over thirty years. I had been corresponding with Ev for a couple of years and in spite of my reluctance to take to the air for the first time my wife Iris and I finally accepted her invitation to visit her & her husband Bruce at their Massachusetts home. One highlight of the visit was that she had paid for us to attend the American Rock Garden Society annual meeting in Peabody, Massachusetts. Jim McPhail, at that time the curator of the Alpine Garden at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden, spoke on *'Western Plants in the UBC Rock Garden'*. I was pretty ignorant of western North-American plants at that time, *Lewisia cotyledon* probably being the only one that I knew anything about, and I looked forward to the talk. I little thought that, because of Ev's comment and Jim's talk, I would speak at an International Conference twenty years later on *'Growing Western Plants in the UK'*. Ev also took us to meet Lincoln & Timmy Foster, who gave us what Ev called the \$50 tour of their garden; later that holiday we met Geoffrey Charlesworth and Norman Singer for lunch and a personal tour of both their gardens. The knowledge and enthusiasm of these iconic figures for North-American plants – particularly the westerners - were the



Lewisia brachycalyx

sparks that lit the fire of my interest. So the seeds were sown; as soon as I heard that the 1982 NARGS conference was to be held in Boulder, Colorado I determined to go. That conference blew me away with visits to Mount Evans, the Rocky Mountain National Park and Denver Botanic Gardens. The flames were further fanned by meeting Anne Spiegel at the 1994 NARGS Asheville conference; as I helped out at her book sales table, I discovered that she was also a western plant fanatic. Since that time I have attended five conferences in the western United States and spoken at two including the Interim International Conference at Snowbird in Utah. I have been lucky to have had invitations to give talks to many NARGS chapters during three short tours and one long (28 day) tour that included the privilege of talking to two groups in Alaska. Although this has meant a great deal of travelling, sometimes on my own, I have seen fantastic plants and am grateful to have met some wonderful and generous people.

Arizona



In the early years of learning about western alpinists I was enthusiastic about lewisias, having grown *Lewisia cotyledon*, *L. columbiana* and *L. nevadensis* (which purported to be *L. brachycalyx* and when I saw it the flowers were always white). Browsing through that wonderful book *Rocky Mountain*

Alpinists from the 1986 Interim International Conference in Denver I read in Sonia Lowzow's chapter 'Island in the Sky' of a pink form that grows in Arizona. Determined to see this plant, I contacted Sonia - by that time married and Sonia Lowzow Collins - on our next trip to the United States. Our trip around Arizona took in the Sonora Desert Museum, a talk on lizards and an introduction to humming birds.

We eventually met Sonia, who took us to the White Mountains to see *Lewisia brachycalyx*. We were disappointed: we saw a few flowering stems of *L. pygmaea* but all *L. brachycalyx* were over. She made up for that by treating us to an English tea party with a table, four chairs and a tablecloth by a stream where we all had tea & cakes. She gave me three plants of *L. brachycalyx* that had flowers in different shades of pink; I still have one of these of deeper shade and have grown hundreds of plants from its seed. Her other presents were very welcome: *Erigeron scopulinus* from moist and shaded rocks near a waterfall in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona - this species is now quite popular on the show bench because it quickly forms a floriferous mat; *Talinum brevifolium* that I spotted in a trough; and seed of *Townsendia exscapa* that had the biggest flowers I have ever seen on this species. Sadly, Sonia died a few years ago but *L. brachycalyx* and *Talinum brevifolium* live on. *L. brachycalyx* dies down a couple of months after flowering and starts growth in late winter. Its colour in this form varies from pale to deep pink in seed-grown plants.

Talinum brevifolium only opens its flowers in bright sun so it isn't very good as an exhibition plant but does well in the alpine house. It dies down in winter to an underground root system and comes into growth in late spring. Growth can be quite vigorous on large plants. It comes easily from seed but, when collecting seed, be careful - the capsules break open as soon as they are touched - hold a seed envelope under them to be on the safe side.

Townsendia exscapa, like most of the genus, comes easily from seed; if you sow the seed as soon as it is ripe it usually germinates within three or four weeks.

California



California has always attracted me. During a couple of speaking tours I was able to visit

locations I didn't know existed. Janet Haden arranged a trip with Wayne Roderick to the Mount Diablo State Park and the Fire Interpretive Trail, a gentle Sunday morning walk. This lovely area is just 28 miles from San Francisco and at 3849' (1170 m) has wonderful views all around. Just off the trail we saw *Lewisia rediviva* var. *minor* with its lovely crystalline petals bright against the black shingle; the good thing about it is that it comes true from seed, always giving white flowered plants. We also found *Allium falcifolium* with short stems almost hidden in the undergrowth. Five years on we went on the same walk, seeing a group of *Calochortus*



Townsendia exscapa



Lewisia rediviva ssp. *minor*



Allium falcifolium



Calochortus amabilis



Eschscholzia californica



Silene californica



Dudleya cymosa



Mimulus kelloggii

amabilis and, at the roadside, *Eschscholzia californica*, which of course nowadays can be purchased at many garden centres in spring.

From San Francisco I travelled east to Sonora for a talk to the Sierra Chapter. I was taken on an easy and level walk along the Tuolumne Westside Rail Trail, a disused railway track, where I marveled at the large stands of lupins. *Silene californica* grew in a shady area, with brick red flowers on stems of about 15 cm, unlike the short-stemmed form that exhibitors favour. There was *Dudleya cymosa*, a plant I had only previously seen hanging from rocks near the sea, here self-sown in tight rock crevices at the side of the trail. Colonies of the beautiful *Mimulus kelloggii*, an annual, sprang from rock crevices.

Sonora is quite close to one of my favourite national parks, Yosemite. This park is famous for its waterfalls, great hiking trails and wonderful scenery. It also has many great plants; one often seen in late spring and early summer is *Penstemon rupicola* growing from the edge of the rocks on one side of the road and lining the drop-off on the other.

Two extremely rare lewisias have been photographed in and just outside of Yosemite by Jack Muzatko, one of my hosts. Jack has an unusual system for growing lewisias, involving narrow cylinders and cooling pipes too complicated to explain here. However he is a good photographer and managed to find *Lewisia disepala* and *L. kelloggii* on his visits

to the park. Although both these species have been offered in one American seed list, they are notoriously difficult to germinate. Jack in his exasperation tried the novel way of concealing the seed in small lumps of food and feeding the food to rats. He then collected and dissected the droppings to see if any chemical reaction had taken place to help germination. Unfortunately all the seeds were soggy and useless; such may be the lot of the retired research chemist! He gave me a packet of good *L. kelloggii* seed to try but only one germinated and the seedling died in the second year. Rick Lupp once gave me this species and I grew it on for about five years before donating it to a well-known nursery that specializes in lewisias. I grew it in the same conditions as *L. rediviva*; I believe *L. disepala* would have to be treated similarly, with a dry resting period after seed set or flowers dying down, then watering from September onwards.

Driving out of Yosemite and back to Lee Vining, take the 395 south to Bishop and from here you can drive into the White Mountains, home to the ancient Bristlecone Pines, the oldest known trees on earth. Located across a deep valley to the east of the Sierra Nevada, the White Mountains are at the fringe of the Great Basin. It's a bit of a drive up but I was young and foolish at that time and never noticed a clause in the hire contract that said I could only drive on paved roads. Nowadays it isn't recommended to drive up with a saloon or



Penstemon rupicola on Bohemia Mt



Lewisia kelloggii (Jack Muzatko)



Astragalus coccineus



Primula suffrutescens en masse



Rest rooms in the snow



Campanula shelteri



Primula suffrutescens

campervan. Besides, I read that wonderful plants could be found at Schulman Grove and further on to Patriarch Grove. The climb takes you up about 6000' (1800 m) with the occasional drop-off to deter those afraid of heights. Part-way up are picnic tables where you may calm down before driving on. But be careful of the chipmunks and ground squirrels as they will pinch your food from under your very nose. Although our timing for the plants seemed to be right we missed seeing the scarlet flowers of *Astragalus coccineus*, but *Penstemon speciosa* was just coming into flower.

It is generally accepted that *Astragalus coccineus* is the most attractive of the *Astragalus* species. All *Astragalus* or *Oxytropis* seed germinates easily if chipped, nicked with a knife, or rubbed between two pieces of sandpaper to allow moisture to access the tough skin. The plants need very little moisture over winter and usually flower in the second year.

Leaving the White Mountains and travelling north towards Lake Tahoe and Carson Pass you may take a side trip and a hike to Winnemucca Lake. At the right time there are loads of flowers to be found including the only evergreen primula in the western United States: *Primula suffrutescens*. Viable seed of this species has been freely available in the trade seed lists and I have grown it successfully. It may also be propagated with cuttings. It flowers at snowmelt time and needs plenty of moisture in spring.



From Tahoe to Etna where I was to speak to the Shasta Chapter is a fair old drive. Bev Shafer met me and we decided to go to see the location of *Campanula shetleri*. This involved a journey past Mount Shasta and a steady climb past roadside snow until the road became completely blocked. Even the restrooms were snowbound. We got out of the car, Bev pointed to the top of the mountain towards Castle Lake and said 'It's up there but it won't be out for a few months yet!' What a let-down.

Campanula shetleri is a beautiful but frustrating species. Slugs love it in the garden so I have to grow it in the alpine house but even there it may be short-lived. My picture shows it is a crevice dweller and it requires all of this when grown in a pot; I also suggest a good inch or two of grit around the top. Propagate this plant by rooted pieces from its edge or by seed which it quite often sets. I have had plants ranging from white to deep blue. Although I didn't see *C. shetleri* at that time I visited, I was taken to see many other fine plants.

The next couple of days were a joy. Phlox Hill is the nickname of a few acres of private land where numerous good plants grow. The nickname is very apt - thousands of pink mounds of *Phlox hirsuta* are there amongst the yellow of *Lomatium* species. A trip into the mountains

Fritillaria recurva (upper photo: courtesy of Joe Willis © Black Oak Publishing)



Viola beckwithii

showed me *Fritillaria recurva* in their thousands on land owned by one of the chapter members and then some low lying meadows with dozens of *Viola beckwithii*, which also grew on Phlox Hill but were not in flower at that higher elevation. I had to crawl under some barbed wire but it was worth it just to see one of my favourite westerners.

I have tried growing *V. beckwithii* from seed for many years. First a cotyledon appears and dies down in late summer. The following year a true leaf appears and that dies down. You hope that a flower will appear the following year. No such luck - it takes at least another two years. Having seen Joy Bishop's plant flowering after five years, my patience has not yet run out. Where I saw it, the plant is fed from snow melt so must need plenty of spring moisture and a fairly dry period once it has died down. It forms a small tuberous rootstock several inches below the surface when grown in a pot but I think it is probably deeper than that in nature so as to protect from summer heat.

Fritillaria recurva is a lovely fritillary but I have never had the opportunity to grow it and here it was blooming all over the floor of the wood where a chapter member was renovating an old cabin. With four weeks of the tour still to go, I had to decline some dug-up bulbs; just my luck. *Pedicularis densiflora* grew in the same area, surrounded by pine trees. I have never seen it in cultivation but the deep red bracts would make a lovely sight on the show-bench.

Nevada



We must leave California now and travel east through Nevada where *Eriogonum shockleyi*, the extremely rare *E. holmgrenii* and the beautiful *Primula nevadensis* may be found. I have grown both the eriogonums from seed, very difficult to come by and both even more difficult to grow. The powder-puff *E. Holmgrenii* (Holmgren's Buckwheat) is only found in eastern Nevada but *E. Shockleyi* has wider distribution. Mine is no longer with me but I have somehow managed to hang onto *E. holmgrenii* that I grew from seed collected by John Andrews in 1996. The unusual thing about the flowers of *E. holmgrenii* is that they are white at flowering time but age to a lovely raspberry pink. I haven't been successful with cuttings but I did have a couple of seeds that germinated, and the plants were given away.

I have managed to grow only two of the deciduous western primulas and *Primula nevadensis* is one of them. Even when seed can be obtained, it is reportedly difficult to germinate. Mine came from John Andrews (yet again - what a pity he no longer collects) in 1995. The species grows on limestone rubble, fell fields and screes, flowering in late June to mid-July. Most of these primulas grow in remote areas so seed collecting is indeed extremely difficult.



Phlox hirsuta



Eriogonum shockleyi



Eriogonum holmgrenii



Primula nevadensis (photo, Jay Lunn)



Penstemon compactus
Castilleja sulphurea



Phlox pulvinata
Townsendia montana



Utah



Utah is full of photogenic scenery such as Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon and Arches National Park. The Fiery Furnace Walk gives a fascinating look at the Arches scenery and choice plants abound. I walked along a shady path in Zion to find hundreds of *Dodecatheon dentatum* hanging from a cliff face drenched with snowmelt. A few hundred metres on is the river entrance to Zion through which Brigham Young led his followers in 1848. Another time I found *Aquilegia chrysantha* in flower under water dripping from an overhead rock and had to hold a waterproof jacket over myself to photograph the plant. Seed of this species is frequently offered in North-American lists. We almost divorced over a visit to Bryce Canyon when I asked my wife to hold up a coat to shelter *Calochortus nuttallii* from the wind. After some frank discussion we came to an arrangement whereby my wife lay on the ground holding the stem while I photographed it.

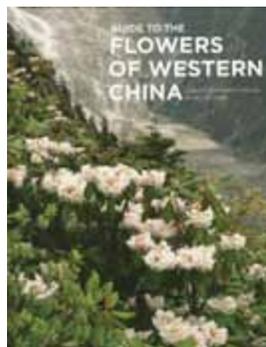
In recent years I have had the good fortune to speak at the Interim International Conference in Snowbird. This let see me more of Utah, with its many interesting places and plants. Anne (and Joe, a *fast* hiker) Spiegel took me to her 'alpine beach' - and her name wasn't far wrong. We drove up Little Cottonwood Canyon past the conference and ski centres to Albion Basin and parked near the trailhead. After passing through the meadows this part of the Great Western Trail takes a short climb to Catherine Pass at an elevation of 10240' (3120 m). Near the top the trail became very sandy, much like a beach, and in it grew some beautiful alpines: *Phlox pulvinata* in tight clumps; *Townsendia montana* even better than in my alpine house; *Castilleja* of various colours abounded including the lovely green-yellow *C. sulphurea*; and a lovely blue *Penstemon compactus* that had somehow seeded itself in the scree. The onward trail to Sunset Peak about 430' (130 m) higher offered wonderful views all around, especially of Catherine Lake.

In my next, part II, I will share some of the delights of the Blue Mountains of Utah, and beyond.

From above: Arches; *Aquilegia chrysantha*; Zion; *Calochortus nuttallii*; Catherine Lake



Guide to the Flowers of Western China
Christopher Grey-Wilson and Phillip Cribb
ISBN 9781842461693
642 pages, 2200 colour photographs,
10 maps, hardback
Kew Publishing £70



And here's another number to ponder - weight 1.6 kg, on the kitchen scales. However one looks at it, this book is a heavyweight, a monumental undertaking by two of the most experienced and distinguished botanists in the UK and it says a great deal for their stamina as well as their knowledge and contacts to have assembled such a mass of information in one volume. Western China has one of the world's richest floras with many endemic species and several genera having their epicentres of distribution in this area; it is a largely temperate flora, of significance to us as the source of many of our garden plants. This, then, is an important reference book.

The *Introduction* explains the scope of the book, both geographically and with regard to plant selection, then moves on to how the plant descriptions are laid out, and ends with details of China's topography, climatic zones and floristic regions. The *Species Descriptions* which take up the bulk of the book are presented in Family order and include habitat, distribution, altitude and flowering time. The image titles specify the photographic location or state if cultivated and include the photographer's initials. Variation within a species is illustrated with additional photographs; most of the species descriptions are accompanied by images. Keys to aid identification occur throughout the text; in large genera such as *Primula* and *Rhododendron*, the keys are at Section or Subsection level.

For convenience, the layout has the descriptions and the corresponding photographs on facing pages, an achievement which must have involved some juggling, not always successfully. For instance, it appears that the images of *Cremanthodium rhodocephalum* and *C. campanulatum* have been renumbered and moved to fit the dimensions of the colour plate without changing the order of text and titles. In a brief trawl of a few genera I found several errors, mainly in titles. But in a work of this size and complexity there will be errors; suffice to say, don't be misled, there is only one image of *Pleione scopulorum* in the book.

What of the photographs themselves? Ah, would that we all could emulate that master of plant photography, Toshio Yoshida! In addition to the authors, about sixty named photographers and botanical establishments contributed images. Inevitably, the quality is variable,

understandable perhaps since, for the majority of us, photographing plants in mountainous terrain is an opportunistic exercise, thwarted more often than not by weather and time. While we must accept some poor images of these rare species if we are to see them at all, what is less acceptable is the heaviness of the colour printing throughout the book. This, together with the fact that many of the images are frustratingly small, often makes it hard to distinguish details and compounds the difficulty of identification, the *raison d'être* of the book. Many of the beautiful landscape plates in the *Introduction*, too, are without sparkle and disappointingly dark.

My attitude to guide books has been illogically equivocal ever since an incident a long time ago in eastern Bhutan when we met up with a party who related happily that they had found lots of '*Primula edgeworthii*' nearby; this, in spite of the fact that they carried a first edition of the excellent and blameless Polunin & Stainton whose coverage stops at Nepal's eastern border and which states clearly that *P. edgeworthii* extends eastwards only as far as central Nepal. All caveats aside, is this latest volume a useful tool? – for any person interested in or going into the area, it most certainly is; the alternative is to spend hours searching the on-line *Flora of China* or in the herbarium. The enormous work of the *Flora of China* project has now made this guide possible. Had it been available a few years earlier when I was trying to identify a *Solms-laubachia* and other difficult Cruciferae on the Tibetan plateau, I would have been very grateful.

Anne Chambers

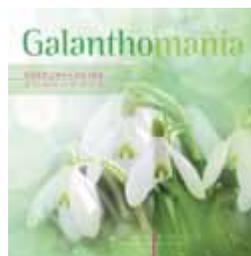
Galanthomania

Hanneke van Dijk

ISBN: 9789089892430

160 pages, 660 colour illustrations

Terra Lanoo £27.50 (ACC Distribution)



In wintertime when there are so few flowers in the garden, snowdrops bring a lot of excitement. A current craze means high prices are paid for bulbs at auctions or on eBay; the record stands at £357 for one bulb of 'E A Bowles'. Hence, the publication of *Galanthomania* is well timed. Hanneke van Dijk has already published in Dutch, *Sneeuwkllokjes*, in 2003. *Galanthomania* is an update on development since then and is written in Dutch (on the left) and English (on the right), no doubt with a view to reaching a wider audience.

Hanneke proposes a revolutionary classification that divides snowdrops into ten groups. It works well for the majority of varieties but

not for those where the markings are not constant from year to year. A very simplistic classification based solely on the characteristics of the flowers, it takes no account of the leaves nor of the plant's appearance in the garden and so is not very helpful in identification. It is unlikely to be adopted by many of those enthusiastic and serious collectors of snowdrops - the galanthophiles!

For those who like to know a little about the personalities in the snowdrop world, this book is valuable; about half is devoted to portraits of well-known European galanthophiles, who share their secrets and experience for successful growing and collecting. There is broad agreement that too many snowdrops have been named undeservedly.

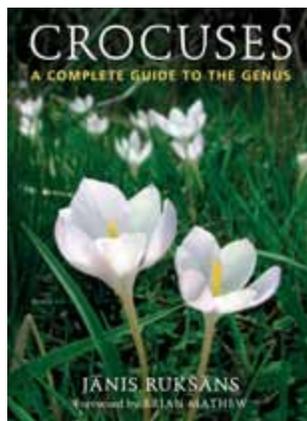
There is a gallery of 500 pictures at the back - twenty pages with twenty five per page. Many new and exciting snowdrops are included, such as 'Elizabeth Harrison' (yellow *Galanthus woronowii*) and 'Green Dragon' (a plicate with green outer markings), two Scottish snowdrops destined for great fame. Gardeners who cannot instantly identify snowdrop varieties will find it useful to have this gallery all together in one book. However, apart from the most distinct ones, it is not very helpful to accurate identification as the pictures only show the flowers; an example is the case of 'Gold Edge' where the name derives from the distinctly yellow margins to the foliage. There is one inaccuracy: 'Hans guck in die Luft', a new German cultivar, is wrongly portrayed.

The book has an unusual square format (25 cm x 25 cm) with 160 pages printed on matt paper. The photographs have reproduced quite well and the layout is excellent. Finer paper would have resulted in better quality reproductions but would have increased the cost. Priced around £20, this book represents reasonable value for money. Should you buy it? It is all a question of expectations. The novice or general gardener will find it full of interest. They will gain an amazing insight into galanthomania along with the dazzling variety of snowdrops in existence, without being burdened by too much detailed information. There is also much to appeal to experienced galanthophiles, but those who are looking for lots of practical and detailed botanical information about snowdrop cultivars and their cultivation may well be disappointed. For them there is already a comprehensive snowdrop monograph (dubbed the *Bible*) by M Bishop, A Davis and J Grimshaw (2006).

New books on snowdrops are infrequent, so *Galanthomania* is a welcome addition that provides two or three hours of light and enjoyable reading. It whets the appetite and might well get the non-galanthophile gardener interested in snowdrops. Snowdrop walks will never be the same again. Our newly educated eyes will be forever seeking small variations and new forms. It could become an exhausting activity but certainly more fun. It will also keep some enthusiasts happily occupied until *Snowdrops 2*, dubbed the *New Testament*, comes out.

Cyril Lafong

Crocuses - a Complete Guide to the Genus
Jānis Rukšāns
ISBN 978-1-60469-106-1
280 pages, 307 colour photos, 10 black & white photos and 4 drawings
Timber Press £30



In his foreword to this excellent work, Brian Mathew does not always share the same view of species and classification but emphasizes that new work on the many new discoveries since the 1980s only adds to knowledge and enjoyment of this fabulous genus. It is a wonderfully honest statement that may help growers with less botanical knowledge to understand that not even the experts always agree. No one person could ever study in detail the variation in *Crocus* and its many species locations and in this volume Janis has combined the knowledge of a number of experts, travellers and growers.

Opening chapters outline the basics of pot and open garden cultivation, with help on how to deal with the challenges of a cold (Latvian) climate. I found the section on pests and diseases of particular interest – it covers a range from rodents to viruses. Chapters on *Botanical Characters* are very clear on the separation of species.

The main body describes species split logically into groups; the main ones being autumn and spring flowering with further sections on those with colour similarities. Each chapter starts with a key to aid identification. Jānis admits that his keys pose problems that he has done his best to overcome. It is easy to criticize keys but very difficult to write them; he has even bravely attempted a key for the unruly *Biflorus* conglomerate.

The species chapters are very easy and enjoyable reading. Gardeners will neither miss nor need detailed botanical descriptions such as appear in Brian Mathew's book. Jānis describes simply and clearly the main features that separate species or subspecies and occasionally gives the measurements wherever they are essential to identifying the different forms. He generously shares his extensive knowledge of plant geography, history and availability in cultivation, as well as hints on how and where to grow them in our gardens. There are frequent nods towards Jānis's hero E A Bowles and his 1924 book *A Handbook of Crocus and Colchicum*.

Two short and useful chapters bring the reader up to date with new & little known species and with wild & garden hybrids. The final and extremely useful chapter lists all species by growing conditions in cultivation. For the experienced and new grower this chapter alone is worth the cover price!

In conclusion this excellent book satisfies the needs of those who are already 'Croconuts' as well as introducing others to the wonderful world of Crocus that lies beyond the garden centres. It might be the only book on Crocus that you will ever need, and with Bowles's *The Hand Book of Crocus and Colchicums* and Brian Mathew's *The Crocus*, it completes an authoritative and very desirable trio.

Ian Young

Patrick Neill : Doyen of Scottish Horticulture

Forbes W Robertson

ISBN: 9781849950329

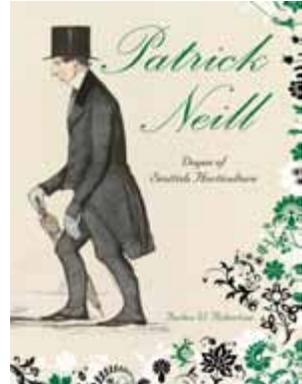
Whittles Publishing £16

If you want to know more of the roots of Scottish gardening from an antiquarian viewpoint, read on.

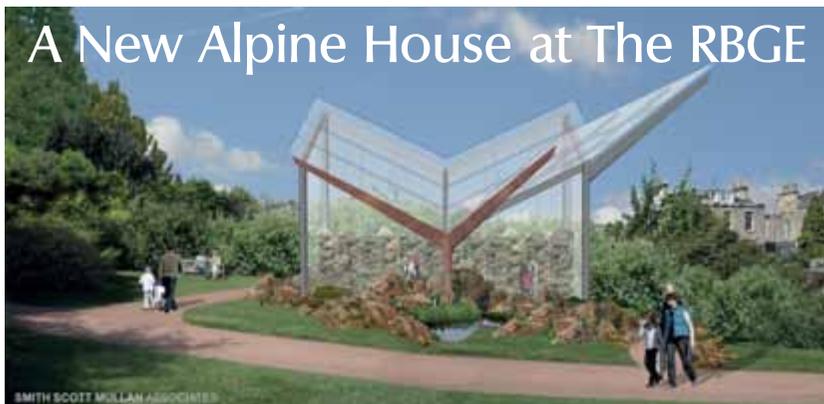
Today, any alpine enthusiast or amateur botanist of modest means who has a few weeks to spare for a holiday may travel just about anywhere. Gardening and the love of plants may be enjoyed by almost all of us. Things were different in the nineteenth century. Relatively few could indulge their plant passions, but Patrick Neill and some of his botanical or land-owning friends were among them. A printer who delegated the running of his successful business, he adopted the life of a privileged single gentleman of learning. His leisure was not misspent: he was a naturalist, a gardener at his house in Canonmills and a genteel wanderer through Scotland. He recorded his experiences in a discursive way redolent of Charles St John in the Highlands, or Johnson in his Scottish travels. Nothing he saw was below mention, were it the rocky flora of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, the sad condition of the Shetland Islanders or the social arrangements for his inspection of the gardens of the Low Countries on behalf of the Royal Caledonian Society - which he had helped found.

Forbes Robertson gives a meticulous account of Neill's life. The book is rich in detail and anecdote that may weary the casual reader. Nevertheless, Scottish or alpine gardeners will take from it a strong feeling of what it meant to be a naturalist in those times. Did we write naturalist? The very word is already becoming archaic. This book, when read with patience and imagination, gives great insight into this now-lost social and intellectual stratum.

Margaret Young & Anton Edwards



A New Alpine House at The RBGE



Members are excited that the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh wishes to build a new Alpine House. Over the last 140 years, the Garden has established itself as a centre of excellence in the research and conservation of alpine plants. The new house will keep the garden at the forefront of this field. The SRGC has previously contributed as a club to the seedcorn funds for the construction of the new building. There is now an opportunity for members to help bring it to conclusion by contributing as individuals.

The New Alpine House

Alpine plants are found at high altitudes between the tree line and the permanent snow line. Their typically dwarf and compact growth is adapted to a dry, cold and windy habitat with high levels of UV light. To grow successfully in Edinburgh, they need shelter from the rain, good ventilation and as much light as possible. The chosen site for the new Alpine House is close to the other public glasshouses in the north-east corner of the Garden and immediately adjacent to the existing Alpine House. The site slopes slightly southwards and receives plenty of light. The existing back-of-house alpine cultivation area is immediately behind, and will serve both the existing and new Alpine Houses.

The new Alpine House will complement the existing Alpine House, but will grow and display the plants in a different way. In the existing house, plants are displayed traditionally, in pots plunged into sand beds. In the new house, they will be grown in tufa, a soft porous rock of calcium carbonate. This



contemporary method provides an attractive display of more natural appearance. It also benefits plant health and extends the range of species which can be grown. Edinburgh's new Alpine House will be the first in any British botanic garden to be fully dedicated to growing alpine plants in tufa. It will be a major addition to the Garden's visitor attractions, appealing to those with and without a specialist interest in alpine plants.

The new house has been designed around the tufa display. A vertical planted wall of tufa forms a backdrop to tufa mounds, giving a range of plant growing and display habitats. Three identical glass roofs shelter the tufa and, despite the simplicity of the underlying geometry, give the house a spectacular silhouette. The space under two of the roofs is enclosed by a tensioned stainless steel architectural mesh to protect the display from birds and animals while maintaining the high levels of ventilation required.



The third roof forms a canopy over an unenclosed area of tufa. A gently ramped public path winds through the display, integrating the external and covered areas, and further planting unifies the new Alpine House with the rest of the Garden.

Your Support Is Needed

The new Alpine House will create a new visitor attraction and will maintain the reputation of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh as a leader in the research, cultivation and conservation of alpine plants. Now is the time for members who value and enjoy the contribution the RBGE makes to our world of alpine gardening to contribute as individuals. This will help bring this project to completion. Please send your donations made out to "RBGE" to Dr David Rae, RBGE, 20A Inverleith Walk, EH3 5LR

The Second Czech International Rock Garden Conference - Advance Notice

2nd – 5th May 2013
Conference

2nd Czech International
Rock Garden Conference 2013



Spolek českých skalek
Czech Rock Garden Society

6th – 10th May 2013
Post Conference Garden Tours

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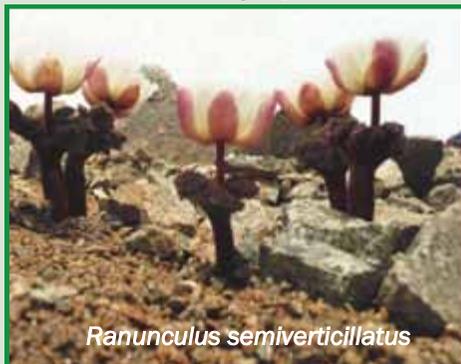
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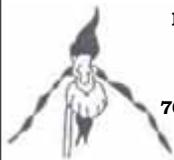
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