



**Alpine Garden Society  
Dublin Group**

[www.alpinegardensociety.ie](http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie)



**NEWSLETTER NO. 71 – WINTER 2019**

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Front cover illustration is of *Cyananthus flavus*, see p. 23. (Photo: Jamie Chambers)

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## ALPINE MISCELLANY

For the first time since I became Editor there is no article from Liam Byrne on cultivation in this edition of the Newsletter. I hope Liam will be returning to these pages in the future. Meanwhile, we have a comprehensive piece from Paddy Smith on growing the beautiful *Cyclamen persicum*, which as many of you know, Paddy grows to perfection. I think his article, while showing us all how to produce red-sticker-winning examples of this species, is also an object lesson in how to approach the cultivation of any plant. Find out the conditions in which the plant grows in the wild and then try to approximate those conditions in your garden, learning from your failures and persevering until you succeed. I hope to see a lot more *C. persicum* exhibits on the show-bench in future. Thank you, Paddy, for your generosity in sharing your methods with us.

**Facebook page and website** from Fionnuala Broughan

We were a bit ahead of the curve this year, getting our own website revamped and updated just a few months before the main AGS site was re-designed and re-launched. We've also tried to be more active on Facebook over the last year to eighteen months, and I notice that again, the main society has moved in the same direction.

One of the ways we've tried to make Facebook more engaging is to share more photos of our own main events (garden visits, the shows) and also by putting up our events on our Facebook page as well as on the calendar on our website. We've also started to share items from other sources that we hope will be of interest to all our members - so we've shared items from other alpine groups on Facebook, from Scottish Rock, links to Ian Young's Bulb Log, posts from the main AGS Facebook page and from other plant-related groups in Ireland. We do hope you find this interesting and if you haven't had a look yet, do pay us a visit: just search for @AGSIreland on Facebook.

If you don't want to grapple with Facebook, you can always find out what's on by visiting our website; the calendar there lists all our planned events for the year. We've started to add pictures to the Galleries (last summer's garden visit is there) and of course there's information about

the main shows. We've had a few teething problems with the site, but both Jamie and I hope to work on resolving these in the next couple of months, so do bear with us.

### **Annual Show** from Gavin Moore

On a dull grey winter's day, spring seems like a long time away. To me, it's hard to believe that we're closer to the 2019 Show than to last year's, which doesn't seem that long ago. What that means is that it's already time to be thinking of the three Irish shows in 2019. Any experienced exhibitor will tell you that the hard work of showing happens long before the big day. It's unlikely that you will stumble across a bench-worthy exhibit ten days before the show. Now is a very good time to go through your garden and your pots to identify possibilities.

The first show is our local show, which is only just over three months away. This show is always a very enjoyable event and, if you have not yet exhibited at a show, this is the place to start. You can see what Fionnuala has in mind for this year's event on page 6.

Next up is the most important event in the Group's calendar: the Dublin Show. We'll have the earlier date this year, which is usually slightly lighter on the numbers than the later one. We'll need all the exhibitors that we can get to fill the benches, so please do think now about what you could exhibit. If like me, many of your show plants are looking sad and miserable, or even completely invisible, then why not give them a bit of a spruce up now? I've taken some pots of bulbs and, if I didn't re-pot them in autumn (shame), then I tidied up the pot, removed any weeds (more shame) and gave it a new top dressing. It's much easier to do that now rather than when the bulbs have emerged, which some have already done. This can be done with any show plants. In addition to giving them a tidy up, make sure that you put them somewhere with a little protection from the harshest weather. Wind, hail, and whatever else our winter throws at us this year, can be very damaging to the appearance of a show plant, albeit not necessarily bad for the plant's health. For those of you who grow from seed, and you all should, there will be a travelling award at our show for the best plant grown from seed. This can theoretically be in the Novice section so it anyone's to win.

Finally, in late April, the Ulster Group Show is celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It's a cliché to say so, but like most clichés, it's true: we would not have had so many successful shows in the past without the Ulster Group. It would be great in 2019 to have as many exhibitors there as possible and, even if you can't bring show plants, do try to travel to Greenmount for the day. It's always a very enjoyable event.

### **Committee**

We are looking to fill two vacancies on the Committee. Sandra Fowler, who joined the Committee recently, has found that due to a significant increase in time pressure in her personal life she had to step down. We're sorry to see her go and hope she will consider rejoining in the future. Val Keegan is one of our longest serving members (I'm the other) and has decided to call it a day at the AGM. She has made an enormous contribution to the Group in her time on the Committee even apart from her lengthy stint as Show Secretary. She will be missed greatly because Val is one of those people who is prepared to take on anything and never says no. She will, of course, remain an active member of the Group. Our best wishes to her and Ian and to Sandra.

### **Annual Subscription**

We increased the single sub to €20 (from €18) last year but left the family sub at €25. From 1 January, this year, the family rate will be €30. Despite these modest increases we believe that we still offer the best value of any horticultural society in the country.

### **Fixtures**

Triona has assembled a very attractive programme of events for 2019 and we all owe her thanks for her efforts. The full list is on page 38 and here are some more details which I hope will encourage you to come along.

The AGM on 17 January, in St Brigid's, will be followed by a talk entitled 'Fire and ice – the shared Flora of Iceland and Ireland' by Gary Mentanko. Gary has given us a talk previously on northern Canada which was very well received, so I am really looking forward to hearing him again especially on such an interesting topic. We try to get through the formalities of the AGM as efficiently as possible but are always open

to responding to any views, critical or otherwise, from members so please join us.

On Saturday, 23 February, our Annual Lunch will be preceded at 12 pm sharp by Fionnuala Fallon on 'The education of a gardener'. Fionnuala is well known in horticultural circles as the gardening columnist of the Irish Times and as a speaker on gardening topics. She has given this talk to other groups and we have had very good reports of it.

Since the Group was founded, we have held our lunch in the Royal St George Yacht Club which is a lovely venue, but we were disappointed with the food and service last year so decided to move to the nearby Royal Irish Yacht Club. There will be a three-course meal followed by tea or coffee. We have heard high praise for the quality of the food, service and ambience and the cost will be €29 per person. This has always been a convivial and enjoyable occasion and, with such a good speaker, and a good lunch at a reasonable price, why would you miss it? Please get your booking form in early.

On 14 March, in Glasnevin, Neil Porteous, who is Head Gardener for National Trust gardens in Northern Ireland, will talk to us on 'Expanding the collection at Mount Stewart'. Many of you will have visited Mount Stewart and will know what a wonderful garden it is. Neil is in great demand as a speaker and we can look forward to an interesting and entertaining talk. This fixture is joint with the IGPS.

Our Local Show is on Saturday, 23 March, in St Brigid's, opening at 2pm. We feel that this event is undervalued by members so Fionnuala, who is in charge, sent me the following with a view to encouraging a better attendance.

As always, we urge all of you to come along for the first opportunity in the year to give your plants an outing. Remember, you don't have to exhibit competitively, you can just bring along your plants or miniature gardens to show them on the 'informal' display bench. This is a chance for all of us to share our plants with other members and friends, but without the worry of competition! This year we'll also have a 'plant clinic' where you can bring along a plant you're worried about and get

advice from one of our experienced growers. When I brought a plant to a clinic like this only a few years ago I was certain that my *Draba longisiliqua* was dead. To my huge relief, Val reassured me that they all look like that so early in the year and that it would recover. It did, and it even went on to win a First in the Intermediate Section last year. And I'd been on the verge of throwing it away...

So, you don't need to compete, but if you wish to, the local show is the place to do it. It's a way more relaxed setting than one of the main shows and it's a good way to get feedback on why your plant has or hasn't done well. Everyone competes at the local show, from the beginner, with just a couple of pots at home, to the very experienced growers.

And speaking of beautiful plants, the members' plant sale is a great place to pick up gorgeous plants (for a song really!). Given the time of the year, there are always snowdrops in enough variety to please ardent galanthophiles, and last year I bought some beautiful *Cyclamen coum* that are now blooming under a Japanese maple in my garden.

Generous growers from the Society donate plants to the plant sales every year and we thank them! But have you ever wondered how the more experienced growers manage all their seeds, seedlings and young plants? How they track their propagation? Labels? Databases? In notebooks or on laptops? Our 'talk' at the show this year will be more of a series of show-and-tells, and we will have a few experienced growers share with us their secrets of staying organized and keeping track.

So, all in all, we've a great show planned, and we do hope to see you there. Thanks, Fionnuala.

On Saturday, 6 April, our main Show will be at Cabinteely Community College, as usual. Gavin has already made his annual plea for more exhibitors and I second his call. We also need visitors of course, so please, please, encourage your neighbours, relatives and friends to come along. It is a great afternoon and they are guaranteed to enjoy it. For anyone unfamiliar with it there are the glorious exhibits of alpine and

woodland plants, grown to perfection (although the judges don't always agree); the Group plant sale; seven commercial plant stalls; refreshments; and often lovely background music from a live and expert pianist. We also need plants for the sale so please have a look around your garden well in advance of the day to see what you might bring.

Gavin has also mentioned the 80<sup>th</sup> Ulster Group Show which is on 27 April. This is a special anniversary event and I would urge members to consider attending. Like our Show, it is a great day out and the mutual attendance of members of both groups helps to cement the excellent and very beneficial relationship that exists between us.

On 16 May, in Rosemount School, Sandyford (our regular venue is unavailable), Zoë Devlin, in a talk called 'Blooming Marvellous', will tell us all about our native flora on which she is an acknowledged expert. Zoë was to give us this talk last year but had to cancel due to illness. It should be delightful.

On Saturday, 18 May, we are going to Susan Tindall's Nursery and Garden in Ballynahinch and to the garden of Hilary and William McKelvey in Newry. The cost of €35 covers bus, entrance to Susan's Garden and refreshments while there. You should bring a packed lunch. We visited the McKelveys in 2015 and were given a very warm welcome to their lovely garden which is full of treasures both alpine and other. Susan's garden is also full of interest and you will have the opportunity to purchase plants from her extensive range. There are more details on the booking form and as numbers will be limited you should reserve your place early.

I will provide more details of the autumn fixtures in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, I hope to see a good attendance at our fixtures this year and on behalf of the Committee and myself I wish all members the very best for 2019.

**Billy Moore**



## *Cyclamen persicum*

I have been growing cyclamen for more than fifteen years now and it has become a very rewarding and absorbing pastime. It is possible, by choosing from the twenty-four species in the genus, to have plants flowering for ten months of the year. As an added bonus you can have in your collection a wide range of flower colours and leaf forms as most species are quite variable. In this article I will outline my growing regime for the natural wild *Cyclamen persicum*.

Everyone will be familiar nowadays with the very attractive, late autumn/winter flowering cultivars of *C. persicum* that we see from October onwards in all outlets that sell plants. These fall into the category of 'Florist's Cyclamen' and are not hardy. They have been bred since about the middle of the Nineteenth Century and very many cultivars have been introduced and are popular as houseplants. They come in varying sizes, flower shape and colour, leaf shape and leaf pattern. The smaller forms are lovely plants but will not survive in the open garden for any length of time. They make attractive pot



plants for the cool conservatory or greenhouse. Many, especially the white flowered forms, have a lovely fragrance and some have striking foliage. They can be kept going in pots if desired and I will outline how I grow them later.

The wild form, which is the subject of this article, is a much more refined and elegant plant entirely, with white or varying shades of pink, highly scented flowers, held well above the nicely marked foliage. It is easily grown in pots in a cold greenhouse and will survive temperatures down to about -2°C. My methods of cultivation are based on my experience to date, including my many failures. It is as a result of these



One of Paddy's beautiful *Cyclamen persicum*. (Photo: Billy Moore)

failures that I have adjusted my culture methods and for me these are now reaping rewards.

To grow any plant successfully it is important to have an appreciation of the conditions in which it grows in the wild. *Cyclamen persicum* is native mainly to countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and grows in hot, dry, summer conditions and cool, damp winters that are generally frost free. We can approximate these conditions by providing a dry summer rest in the dormant period and damp, not excessively wet, compost in a generally frost-free greenhouse or frame during the growing season. I will outline my methods from seed sowing in the autumn, through the

seasons, until time for repotting after the period of dormancy twelve months later.

### **Sowing seeds**

Cyclamen seeds can be had from the AGS, SRGC and Cyclamen Society seed exchanges and usually arrive in January, but it is best not to sow them then. Store them dry in the fridge until the following August/September which is their natural time for germination. Before sowing it is advantageous to soak them in lukewarm water with a couple of drops of washing up liquid as a wetting agent for twenty-four hours to remove the germination inhibitor from the seed surface. Rinse well and, for ease of handling, allow the seeds to become just damp before sowing.

Cyclamen seeds are not fussy about the compost used as long as it is free-draining and can be kept damp at all stages. An easy seed compost is equal parts peat compost, Perlite and coarse sand (Perlite may be replaced by extra sand). Fill a 9 or 11cm pot up to 2cm from the top with the moistened compost mix and sow seeds equally spaced apart. About twenty to twenty-five seeds is ideal for a 9cm square pot. Lightly cover with compost and top off with a layer of grit. Water lightly on top of the grit until water flows from the base and allow time to drain. The pot should be stored in a shaded spot; under the greenhouse staging is ideal. Ensure that the compost remains damp and, in approximately three weeks, check for some germination. If there is none don't give up, germination will usually follow later in the season. As soon as germination is observed provide more light but avoid direct sunlight until the plants are actively growing. Ideally, seedlings should be grown on in the same pot for two years and then transplanted individually into 7cm pots or equivalent in September.

### **Repotting and potting-on**

September and October are the preferred months for repotting established *Cyclamen persicum* plants. In late August, after their summer rest, start watering pots from the base or wet the sand bed/plunge where they are resting. Water may be added to the top sparingly, taking

care to avoid it coming in contact with the crown of the corm. In about three weeks after the addition of water, plants will start to produce leaves from the corm, and as this is an indication that the plant is in active growth again, you may repot it if required. Do not repot before leaf growth is visible as I have found it does not take kindly to root disturbance when still dormant. I offer this advice having lost some good plants by repotting too early. Ideally, repot established plants every second year and young plants, including seedlings, every year.

## **Compost**

Cyclamen will grow successfully in a wide range of composts provided it is free draining, moisture retentive and has a generally low nutrient content. I use soil-based compost mixes as I could not get a satisfactory John Innes compost locally, and not wishing to use peat composts I decided to experiment and make my own mixes.

By volume it is 30% damp perlite, 30% coarse grit, 20% coarse sand, 10% garden soil, 10% leaf mould or peat. To this I add 3 grams/litre of limestone fines, 4 grams/litre of bonemeal and approximately 3% wood ash (optional).

Currently I am very satisfied with this mix as it produces healthy plants and responds very well to my cultivation methods.

The mix recommended in most cyclamen cultivation articles is usually equal parts John Innes No. 2, leaf mould or peat, perlite, and grit. An alternative mix using a peat compost is: equal parts peat compost, coarse sand, and grit or Perlite.

Keep a note of whatever mix you use and, if you wish, change it next time round. If you do adjust it, you will probably be adding more drainage material! Have no fear about using a free draining mix.

Cyclamen will grow in pure sand as many growers will have observed having found stray seedlings growing happily in their sand plunge. I highly recommend the inclusion of perlite in cyclamen compost mixes as it is very effective for opening up a mix resulting in improved drainage



and air content. In my experience I have found that 25 -30% Perlite by volume is the optimum proportion for most mixes.

The benefit of using an open mix is that it is much easier to control and adjust the moisture content of the compost. An open mix with good air content allows water to pass quickly through the pot, wetting the compost and draining away. It works well whether water is added to the top or bottom of pots. When growing cyclamen, the aim is to maintain the compost just wet during the growing season, and damp while dormant in the summer. It is easy to check the moisture content by removing some of the grit and checking the colour of the compost. A dark colour will signify adequate moisture. You will soon get experience and be able to gauge the moisture level by the weight of the pots. If you overwater occasionally, it will soon drain away and no harm to plants is likely to occur.

*Cyclamen persicum* has fairly strong fleshy roots – see photos above - and should be potted into a reasonably deep pot. I like to use the plastic, one litre ‘long tom’ rose pots for most of my plants as they fulfil all the necessary requirements for good root growth and presentation. Larger pots will be required for bigger, older, corms. Repotting established

plants is a relatively simple operation. If the plant is healthy you will notice new white growth starting on several roots. On corms two years old or more I will try to reduce the rootball by at least 50% by removing older compost and spent roots. My aim when repotting is that when placed in its correct position in the new pot the outer part of the corm is approximately 4cm from the edge. To remove the plant from the pot, place the palm of your hand over the top of the corm and turn the pot upside down onto your hand. On removal, take hold of the corm and turn back up as normal so that old compost and redundant roots can fall away. Gently pull the lower roots and remove any brown material and any roots that come away easily. If you get a stale smell from the rootball, investigate more closely especially beneath the corm and remove all roots that do not have white growing tips. Sometimes I have removed up to 80% of the rootball without any harm when I used to use a compost rich in leaf mould or peat. Now, with my current mix, the rootball is much healthier.

Commence repotting by putting some damp compost into the pot and then hold the corm so that its base is just below the top of the pot. The roots of this species are usually fairly strong and will help you to support the corm in this position as you fill the compost into and around the roots, tapping the pot and agitating the roots to eliminate air pockets. Ideally, after you top off the pot with grit the corm should be semi-submerged in the grit. The reasons for placing the corm partly above grit level are twofold. Firstly, the corm is mostly above the damp compost giving improved ventilation, and, secondly, it is well positioned to receive plenty of sunshine during its dormant period. On this occasion, water from above around the grit and place in a shaded well-ventilated area. There should be no need to water again for at least three weeks.

Sometimes you may find a cyclamen with little or no viable root growth when repotting. This may be the result of vine weevil damage or a soggy compost. Don't give up on it. Remove all the old brown roots and place the corm base directly onto the sand bed making good contact and continually keeping damp. Usually after a month, new healthy roots will grow, and the corm can be re-potted as normal.

You may also find several young seedlings have grown from seeds shed in previous seasons. These may be left in place to grow stronger or may be potted up *en masse* by placing a trowel underneath and transferring the lot into a 9cm pot already almost filled with compost. Water to settle in.

### **Care after repotting, during flowering period and onset of dormancy**

After repotting, you will see active leaf growth in October and November. This is also the time of year when temperature decreases, and the weather becomes damp and foggy. This damp atmosphere can easily lead to botrytis. Keeping plenty of ventilation around the plants is crucial at all stages, and only water plants from the base as necessary.

A good method of maintaining plants in healthy condition is the use of a sand bed or plunge. Pots are stood on 5 to 7cm depth of clean sand that is kept reasonably moist. Play sand is ideal. The compost in the pots will extract all the moisture from the sand bed that the plant needs to maintain growth, provided there is good contact between the base of the pots and the sand. In my experience you will probably only have to water the sand about three times between October and March as there is very little sunshine and drying over this period.

All cyclamen have a relatively low water demand and the Mediterranean species need less than the woodland species. I water them by wetting the sand bed when I notice the plants are starting to show signs of needing water. It is important to learn to recognize the difference between a plant that has adequate moisture and one that needs water as this can be the difference between success and failure. The main criterion is the state of the plant's leaves. A happy plant will have a 'feel good' look about it. The leaves will look healthy, have a sheen, and extend outwards at approximately forty-five degrees. On the flip side when a plant is starting to dry out the leaves begin to lose their sheen and start to hang downwards. Add water to the sand bed until you are satisfied there is plenty of moisture at the surface that can be absorbed by the pots. Ideally, the sand should be quite wet to the extent that it is 'sloppy'. At this stage you may think that you have added too much water, however, the next morning you will notice the sand has changed to being just

damp as the pots have absorbed all the moisture they required, and the leaves should be healthy looking again. In December you will notice that the flower buds are developing quite nicely and soon there will be some plants coming into bloom. If you wish you may take the plant into a cool situation in your house to enjoy the beautiful fragrance and flowers. If kept in a cool place the plant will remain in good condition for up to six weeks. Only water when the plant shows signs of needing it. Place in a container with water about half way up the pot and leave until the compost is thoroughly soaked. Keep removing all dead flowers and other debris. By following this regime, you should not have problems with yellowing of leaves and also avoid botrytis.

I love when *Cyclamen persicum* is in flower as the scent in the alpine house is heavenly. It starts flowering in January and the later flowering plants start at the end of March and finish in early May provided they are kept cool and lightly shaded. Up to now, I have not tried bringing plants into flower for specific dates by delaying initial watering or repotting. The only way I try to slow down initial flowering is by trying to keep plants cool for as long as possible. I have observed that some plants are slower at coming into growth and producing flower buds and these are the ones that flower later.

During the latter part of March and into April there will be days when there is strong sunshine leading to high temperatures in the alpine house. This may cause leaves to become floppy. Cool down the alpine house by increasing ventilation, shading, and damping down the sand plunge. Avoid adding water directly to the pot. Later in the day as the temperature drops the leaves will revive and return to normal.

### **Frost and cold weather**

*Cyclamen persicum* should be treated as a frost-tender species. In my experience the wild form can tolerate temperatures a few degrees below freezing while the florist form is more tender. Keeping plants on the drier side is recommended. If some plants need water during a cold spell take them to a frost-free area and give the minimum amount by placing in a tray of water.



Ideally, the alpine house should be kept frost-free by using a thermostatically controlled heater set at 2 °C. If you cannot provide a frost-free environment and the temperatures are forecast down to minus 2 °C place your plants on the floor, cover with fleece and/or newspapers and your plants should escape damage. If you are caught out and encounter frost damage, you will notice some of the leaves have collapsed. Remove affected plants to a cool, frost-free area and avoid sunshine on leaves. Leaves will come back to normal after a couple of days provided temperatures have not dropped below minus 4 °C. Obviously if a severe cold spell is forecast plants will need to be moved to a cool frost-free area.

### **Preparing plants for the dormant summer period and continued care**

In their natural habitat all cyclamen species go into a period of dormancy during the dry, hot, summer. In cultivation plants will do the same and this is activated by temperatures rising. I notice that when the outside temperatures start to reach up to 18 °C, there is a noticeable change in the plants: the leaves start to lose their gloss, some turning yellow and the seed pedicels bend down onto the sand bed. You may think that plants need water; not so, this is a natural change. The higher temperatures have triggered the plant into preparation for its summer rest. As leaves shrivel up the demand for water becomes minimal and it is critical now to ease up on watering by just keeping the sand bed moist.

As the leaves turn brown and crisp, gradually remove any shading to expose the corms to sunshine so that they will ripen and flower well next season. By doing this you are replicating what generally happens in their natural habitat in the dry, hot, sunshine. *C. persicum* has strong roots that are able to penetrate deep into rock crevices and seek out cool damp conditions. I try to replicate this as best as I can, keeping the roots cool by placing timber boards or polystyrene on the side of the pots mostly exposed to the midday sun. I also keep adequate moisture in the sand bed to prevent the compost from becoming too dry. I check this by lifting a few pots to ascertain if the sand is damp. If needed I will water the sand bed sparingly. Last year (2018) during the extreme hot

weather I had to water every four or five days instead of every two weeks or so. During the same hot weather, I covered the pots with cardboard as it was really hot and not having previous experience of such heat, I wished to avoid possible damage to the plants. It was removed as soon as temperatures returned to normal. However, young plants need to be continually shaded in hot weather or they will shrivel. I was glad I took the precautions as plant growth commenced as normal in September.

It is a matter of choice when to remove the brown crisp leaves from plants. I usually do it when collecting the ripe seed pods in late July. From mid-August you will notice the odd plant starting to sprout leaves and this is the start of the annual cycle again - as outlined earlier.

### **Florist cyclamen**

You will probably have bought and grown on these cyclamen and will have observed that they are grown in pure peat and nutrient and wonder how they survive with such poor drainage. In reality there is a high failure rate and the trade regard these plants as disposable after flowering.

Florist cyclamen have been cultivated from the wild persicum species. They have undergone extensive breeding and trials, so they can be mass-produced to flower after one year from seed. They are now far removed from their origins. However, with the care regime I have outlined for the wild species, I have succeeded in growing them into impressive flowering plants that now range up to five years old. Care in timing of watering is the key to success. This is achieved by only watering from the base as leaves start to droop. After flowering, allow recently purchased plants to become almost dry and only water very sparingly. Maintain them in relatively cool conditions and leaves will start to emerge in late summer. Remove up to 70% of the peaty root ball and repot into a good free draining compost mix and water sparingly until there is active growth.

## Summary

*Cyclamen persicum* is a plant of great beauty and it is worth taking a bit of trouble to grow it well. Other growers may do things differently but the regime that I follow, which has evolved over the years, produces good results. In summary, the essential elements for success are: using a free draining compost in plastic pots that are watered from below, and only when the plants need it; exposing plants to good sunshine when dormant to encourage flowering next season; repotting as leaf growth commences; and most importantly providing good ventilation and exercising good hygiene by removing any decaying matter. Growing this plant is no more difficult than most other plants once you become familiar with its few cultural requirements. It is cheap, economical on space, has good variation and will become a very interesting, enjoyable and rewarding experience, and can get good results on the show bench.

**Paddy Smith**



Foliage of *Cyclamen hederifolium* among fallen acer leaves. (Photo: Billy Moore)

## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

**‘Insane? Or an ardent botanist’? Jamie Chambers, 8 November**

In June/July 2017 Jamie and his wife Amanda joined a group, eight in total, led by Martin Walsh for a trip to Bhutan which involved a fifteen-day trek through the Himalaya. For Jamie it was a trip of a lifetime despite long hikes, a lot of rain, and some altitude sickness which was mitigated by Martin’s experience in this regard which ensured that the heights were approached gradually.

There is a certain mysticism about Bhutan and this, combined with the wonderful plants he saw; the local people and their customs; the architecture; the wildlife; and the company of his fellow trekkers, including the guides and porters; made the trip a truly memorable one for Jamie.

He structured his talk by dividing the route into stages, describing the plants, landscape and sights encountered on each stage. He used a detailed map of the route to keep his audience orientated. In this overview of what was a fascinating talk, I will first make some general comments and then describe briefly some of the many plants that they found by plant type rather than by where they occurred on the route. Sonam, their main guide, whom Martin has used on previous trips was invaluable. While no botanist, Sonam has an interest in and some knowledge of the flora and couldn’t have been more friendly and helpful.

The Kingdom of Bhutan, capital, Thimphu, lies in the Eastern Himalayas and is landlocked by Tibet to the North and India to the South. The population (c. 800,000) is mainly Buddhist with a significant Hindu minority. Historically, it was an absolute monarchy but became a constitutional monarchy in 2008. More than 5,400 plants can be found in Bhutan and it also has a large and diverse wildlife. It is very mountainous, the highest mountain being Gangkhar Puensum (7,541m) which has never been climbed, of which more later.

Jamie showed us a number of examples of the traditional architecture, urban and rural. It is mainly of timber, often beautifully decorated. He

included shots of the local people, including children, in their colourful traditional dress. A local market in Punakha proved interesting with a large selection of fruit and vegetables. We saw lots of wildlife, birds, pigs, blue sheep, so-called but not really blue, bees, including *Apis dorsata laboriosa*, the largest honeybee in the world, and other insects and snakes. He was impressed by the wonderful forests they trekked through before reaching the alpine levels. Several examples of colourful Buddhist prayer flags and many shrines showed the depth of religious faith in the country. A visit to the amazing 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery which clings precariously to high cliffs afforded some great views of the surrounding scenery.

One of the drawbacks of botanizing in Bhutan at this time of year is the

weather, but if you want to see a lot of plants in flower you have little choice. It seems to have been unusually wet for this trip, and the mist and relatively low light conditions made photography difficult, but occasional rainbows provided some compensation. It also meant that the spectacular landscape was rarely seen in its full glory, and the group were teased by occasional tantalizing glimpses through the mist. Despite



these hurdles Jamie's pictures illustrating the talk were excellent. Keeping clothes and boots dry was a challenge. Their gear, fortunately, was carried by ponies and mules. There were spectacular rivers and at one point our intrepid travellers had a welcome bathe in some hot springs. Given the circumstances the group enjoyed excellent food throughout – a lot of chicken.

Now to the plants. Bhutan is rich in arisaemas, a genus which Jamie found himself drawn to. One very attractive one was *A. jacquemontii*, as also was *A. griffithii* which, with *A. speciosum*, was notable as well for its huge leaves. *A. consanguineum* is exotic with very nice divided foliage. *Roscoea bhutanica* was abundant at lower altitudes and is a very nice plant. Among the many orchids seen *Oreorchis micrantha* stood out as did the tiny, richly flowered *Corybas himalaicus*. *Maianthemum oleraceum*, formerly *Smilacina oleraceum* is a lovely plant and should be more widely grown. I bet it will be in Martin's new garden. The well-known *Anenome obtusiloba* is another good plant for the woodland garden. *Pleione hookerianum* was growing high on a mossy tree trunk. *Rhododendron keysii* has unusual cylindrical orange flowers with a yellow mouth. A lovely hydrangea relative is *Dichroa febrifuga*, with attractive blue flowers. It is evergreen and an important medicinal plant but may be too tender for our gardens. Some other nice shrubs were *Deutzia compacta* and *Buddleia colvilei*.

Both *Cypripedium tibeticum* and *C. himalaicum* are highly desirable as is *Pinguicula alpina*. It was good to see the familiar *Cassiope selaginoides* in the wild. First sightings of the spectacular *Rheum nobile* were disappointing but they soon came upon many fine specimens. Jamie showed us a nice shot of *Diapensia himalaica* with its solid pink flowers. *Pleurospernum benthamii* is a nice umbellifer and is available.

We saw many different primulas, both species and natural hybrids including pink *P. geraniifolia*; yellow *P. sikkimensis* and *P. elongata*; cream *P. obliqua*; purple *P. griffithii*; white *P. hopeana*; delicate, white *P. munroi*; the dainty *P. primulina*; beautiful, blue *P. glabra*; and my favourite, the lovely *P. umbratilis*. *Meconopsis horridula* subsp. *drukkyulensis* is a rich blue and the smaller *M. bella* a nice sky blue while *M. sherriffii* is a lovely pink. Yellow *M. paniculata* with its attractive foliage was in abundance.

Among the lilies were *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, surprisingly scarce, and the beautiful *Lilium nepalense* (below) which made a strong impression on Jamie, but the real find was a large group of *L. sherriffiae* (See back cover) with its very dark beautifully marked flowers which grows in only three sites in the world. *Fritillaria cirrhosa* has similarly coloured flowers. *Notholirion macrophyllum* is superb. *Anaphalis nepalensis* looked very nice but I don't think it is in cultivation. We saw a number of spectacular meadows, including one with swathes of *Primula smithiana*. *Cyananthus flavus* is gorgeous – photo on front cover.



*Lilium nepalense*. (Photo: Jamie Chambers)

*Corydalis flaccida* has nice deep pink flowers while those of *C. trifoliata* are a rich blue, and *C. calliantha* has yellow flowers and finely-cut glaucous foliage. Yellow flowered *Saxifraga thiantha* grew in rock crevices and another saxifrage, tentatively identified as *S. hemisphaerica* looked most interesting. *S. brunonis* has yellow flowers and trailing red stems. We saw a number of pedicularis, my favourite being *P. oederi*. The abundant pink flowers of *Androsace ludlowiana* were impressive and two smaller, unidentified androsaces were a nice white and yellow. *A. globifera* looks very desirable. *Phlomis tibetica* has striking purple flowers and *Lamiophlomis*

*rotata* has eye-catching deeply-veined pale grey leaves. The gentian relative, *Swertia multicaulis*, is a lovely blue. A special find was *Saussurea gossypiphora* at 5000m. The plants I have mentioned were those that caught my eye, but there were many more.

Towards the end of the trek the group had a stroke of luck when, almost miraculously, the mist parted revealing the majestic peak of Gangkhar Puensum which up to that moment had been shrouded by the prevailing foggy murk.

This was a great talk, full of interest from many aspects and beautifully illustrated with fine photos. Jamie got enthusiastic and well-deserved applause from an appreciative audience.

**Billy Moore**

**‘Thirty-five years and still growing’, Ian Christie, 18 October**

. We were treated to a great night on the occasion of Ian and Ann Christie’s visit. Not only was Ian’s talk very interesting but they also brought plants for sale, many rare and unusual. It was hard to drag the members away from them.

Ian is a very pleasant, soft-spoken Scot. Their nursery is situated in east Scotland about thirty miles from the sea but at a considerable height.

He began by showing us a magical sunrise and then got on to the nitty gritty. Their soil is heavy clay and the hot dry conditions of summer 2018 were followed by monsoon-like rain.

There was a lot of flooding. To keep away ugly liverwort, he puts down wood chips for walking on. He has raised beds higher than normal to make seeing the plants easier for wheelchair visitors. Ian and Ann are not afraid to make what might seem like brutal changes, but which give new planting opportunities. They built a new “sittery” (a place to sit) and around it Ian made many new areas to grow his lovely plants. He built an acid bed using large peat blocks in





which he planted such items as small rhododendrons, campanulas, anemones and cypripediums. He has also created large crevice beds and small ones in troughs.

Ian and Ann have travelled a great deal and introduced many wonderful plants. While showing his beautiful photos Ian also gave us practical hints on growing some of these beauties, for instance, don't be afraid to move plants. *Paris japonica* never flowered until moved somewhere else in his garden where it now flowers well and sets seed. Primulas need to be moved around regularly as they use up the nutrients in the soil. With *Erythronium japonicum* seeds, he wraps them in moss and puts them in a plastic bag in the fridge before sowing. He sows seeds of saxifrages and other small things on the moss covering the top of rocks. He keeps his hepaticas in the greenhouse, not to protect them, but so that he can see them up close and talk to them. He showed us how to divide cypripediums. He sows seeds of things like trilliums in pots covered by fleece tied up like a Christmas pudding.

Ian's pictures of his plants were a treat for the eye: among them were *Lilium mackliniae* 'Saramati' found in Nagaland where the natives once were head-hunters; his now famous *Galanthus woronowii* 'Elizabeth Harrison' which sold on eBay for more than £750; *Moraea alpina* whose flowers last for only one day; *Pulsatilla halleri* which is very hairy and needs to be protected from the pheasant in his garden; *Primula gracilipes*; *Shortia soldanelloides*; and the rare *Paris polyphylla alba*. So many beauties I cannot name them all.

Ian ended his talk by answering questions and then afterwards back to selling more of his special plants

**Barbara O'Callaghan**

## 35<sup>th</sup> Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin, 16 – 18 November



Brian, Mike, Bob and Rannveig. (Photo: Billy Moore)

It has become an annual cliché now for me to say that we just had another highly successful weekend. Those who attended know that this is true and everyone else will have to take my word for it. We had five top class talks which I will tell you about; we enjoyed the convivial atmosphere in An Grianán; throughout we all had the opportunity to talk about our hobby with like-minded folk, including our eminent speakers; after dinner on Saturday we enjoyed Jamie's clever quiz (although there were some truants who gave their attention to a certain rugby game) and the plant auction, presided over with great aplomb by George; we enjoyed, and learned from the Discussion Forum with our expert panel on Sunday morning; and we could buy plants at the

auction, at our own plant sale and from Aberconwy Nursery, Shady Plants, Timpany Nursery and Rannveig Wallis. What more could one ask?

Our thanks are due to Barbara and her team for ensuring that everything ran smoothly. A special thanks to Jamie not just for his quiz but even more for his good-humoured and effective direction of the whole event. Gwenda as usual had a lovely display of cards and bric-a-brac for sale. Thanks to Heather for her crossword, this time with two sets of clues. Valerie looked after the plant sale and Triona ran the raffle. Thanks also to everyone who donated plants to the auction and the plant sale – a large lump of tufa sent down by Harold McBride sold well. The staff at An Grianán looked after us very well. Finally, thanks to all the delegates, especially our friends from the Ulster Group and from Cork without whom the event would not be viable.

The informal slide show on Friday evening was as usual full of variety and interest. George Sevastopulo took us to Sicily at Eastertime and showed us some lovely plants and landscapes as well as an example of the many ancient Graeco-Roman ruins that Sicily is home to. Among the plants the highlight was perhaps the rare white form of *Paeonia mascula*. Carl Dacus was in Geraldton, 424k north of Perth, earlier in 2018. He was saddened by the plight of the Aborigines in the area. Among the many fine plants we saw was *Xantorrhoea preissii* which I would love to be able to grow in my garden. Joan and Liam McCaughey each made a short presentation on a visit to South Africa in 2018. Both were notable for their fine photos. Joan was most impressed by the conservation efforts being made to protect the amazing flora of that country, several examples of which she illustrated. I was impressed by her photos of a number of beautiful gladiolus species. Liam also included gladioli in his slot along with many other plants including splendid shots of brilliantly coloured flowers en masse as well as some wildlife. He also showed us some shots illustrating the stark contrast between black and white neighbourhoods. Liam was prevailed upon to tell us something about a visit to Holland earlier in the year led by Brian Duncan. The trip was marred by the so-called ‘beast from the east’ which resulted in the canals

being frozen over and the fields brown. Nevertheless, we saw the expected displays of tulips and other bulbs at the Breezand Show. He included some images showing the sheer scale of bulb production in Holland.

### **Bob Wallis**

Bob was our first speaker with a wide-ranging talk on Iran's Zagros Mountains, their plants and places of interest, based on several visits to that country by Rannveig and himself. They found that the local people were friendly but Rannveig was mildly irritated by the emphasis on the need for women to dress modestly – “a woman dressed modestly is a pearl in its shell”, read one sign. There are wonderful crafts for sale including rugs and carpets.

The western slopes of the range often consist of open woodland while the eastern side is dry with sparse vegetation in steep-sided valleys which run up and down the mountains. There are many steep cliffs and rocks which are soft, limey, and heavily eroded by snowmelt. The terrain they covered ran from Hamadan to the north, southwards toward Shiraz via Aligudarz and Zardeh Kuh.

Iran's mountains, of course, are noted for the many species of dionysia that are widespread and often inaccessible on the steep cliffs. Dionysias are beautiful but, as we know, are very difficult in cultivation, some, impossible. Bob showed us many different species, but I will mention just a few. The species are often distinguished by microscopic differences and can be difficult to identify in the wild. *D. archibaldii*, found in 1966 by Jim Archibald, is lovely with bright pale mauve flowers which can vary. It is one of the parents of many fine hybrids. *D. bryooides* is somewhat similar. There are many yellow species and *D. lamingtonii* (See back cover) is one of the best. *D. zetterlundii* is another yellow species as is *D. zagrica*. We also saw the recently-discovered *D. iransharii*, a very pale lilac.

Apart from bulbous plants, which are the Wallis's main interest, Bob showed us some of the other plants that grow in these mountains such as various orchids including *Orchis mascula*, *O. punctulata*, *O. anatolica*, *O.*

*collina* and *Ophrys straussii*; jurinellas; onosmas; and veronicas. *Leontice armeniacum* (minor) is a member of the berberis family and has pale yellow flowers with pale blue foliage and attractive pink fruit, lovely. *Linaria michauxii* is very nice but short-lived. *Astragalus* cf *glaucanthus* is an imposing plant; *Primula gaubeana* is yellow with pale grey foliage – rather like *P. verticillata* - and grows on cliffs; *Daphne caucasica* was quite widespread in some areas.

Bulbs grow where there is little competition, so Bob and Rannveig concentrated on areas where there were few other plants. The *Oncocyclus* irises are beautiful but variable and can be identified by their ‘moleskin’ beard. We saw a number of species all of which look desirable. A group of *Iris meda*, this one mainly a creamy yellow, was outstanding. It needs very dry conditions, is growable but not easy. The Junos are equally lovely and also difficult. Among those that Bob showed us were *I. aucheri*, and *I. hymenospatha* subsp. *leptoneura*, a lovely pale blue with gold and dark blue markings. *I. zagrica* is very nice growing at 4150m.

*Fritillaria zagrica* has large navy-blue flowers. Bob showed a slide of an enormous stand, tens of thousands, of an orange *F. imperialis* at 2650m in the Khonsar pass (See p. 40). *F. gibbosa* has white flowers with pink blotches. *F. olivieri* grows in wet conditions and *F. assyriaca* is widespread. *Scilla persica*, pale blue, often grows with *F. reuteri*, easy and lovely, in wet meadows. We saw a magnificent slide of *F. persica* amongst swathes of colourful annuals.

There are also lots of tulips in the Zagros. *T. humilis* is very variable; we saw pink, white with very dark stains at the base of the petals, and lilac ones. *T. biflora*, which grows in stony soil is also very variable. *T. montana* is a nice yellow but can also be red and sometimes orange. Red tulips abound and can be hard to identify. *T. systola* is one such.

*Anemone biflora* is delightful and can be yellow, yellow with a pink back and pink. Various species of the muscari-like *bellevalias* appear in different habitats. *B. pycnantha* is a lovely dark blue and the white *B. cyanopoda* is one of Bob’s favourites. The crocus-like *Merendera wendelboi* has large violet flowers. *Allium bungei* is nice, a small onion. *Corydalis*

*verticillaris* subsp. *verticillaris* is a small plant with nice pink flowers and grows in very stony ground from a large tuber.

The Baktiari tribe are nomads and goat herders. We saw a number of their grave stones in the form of stylized lions meant to show how brave and powerful they are. Bob showed several slides of groups of them in traditional dress with their goats. Throughout the talk we saw lots of slides of the majestic scenery of the Zagros. On one occasion they came across tracks of a large bear in dry mud but, luckily, no bear.

They visited Esfahan and were mightily impressed – a ‘must go’ place. It is Iran’s top tourist destination, huge and majestic with wonderful Islamic architecture including the magnificent Masjed e Emam Mosque. We saw some fine Third Century Sassanian rock carvings in Bishapur as well as a massive statue of Sharpur 1, King of Persia from the same era. We were reminded of more ancient history by some views of Persepolis, constructed around 500 – 300 BC, excavated in the 1930’s, including the tomb of Darius the Great. Persepolis was sacked by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.

Bob closed his very interesting talk with a nice shot of Rannveig and himself in a field of *Fritillaria imperialis* with snowy mountains in the background.

### **Mike Keep**

Mike, of Shady Plants Nursery, opened his talk with an artist’s impression of what a carboniferous forest might have looked like 300 million years ago. From there he traced the evolution of ferns up to the present using fossils as illustrations. After that major event at the end of the Cretaceous period, sixty-five million years ago, which wiped out many plants and animals, including the dinosaurs, the surviving fern spores thrived, and ferns never looked back. In more modern times bracken was used for glass making in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and there was something of a craze for fern collecting by the wealthier Victorians who cultivated the plants in Wardian cases and elaborate greenhouses. He used a chart to illustrate the life-cycle of ferns and their complex

reproduction process and showed us pictures of the spores of different species, and the young plantlets at different stages.

*Dryopteris sieboldii* is a nice fern with entire leaves; *D. erythrosora* is very good in the garden and has bronze new foliage, but *D. e.* 'Prolifica' is a better colour; *Blechnum penna-marina* has nice yellow fronds and is easy in an acid to neutral, damp soil; *Polystichum munitum* is excellent as is *P. x Dycei*, pale green; *P. setiferum* 'Herrenhausen' is good; *Dryopteris affinis* 'Crispa Gracilis' is a small easy plant, ideal for the rock garden; *Salvinia minima* is a water fern; *Osmunda regalis* 'Purpurascens' is truly 'regal' – needs a moist soil to thrive; and *D. wallichiana* is one of Mike's favourites (and mine). Some ferns such as *Woodwardia fimbriata* are nice grown under deciduous shrubs. A slide of a mixture of different species in his garden including the aptly named *Athyrium x 'Ghost'* and *A. nipponicum* 'Burgundy Lace' was most attractive.

Ferns are often used to create living walls and Mike showed us some nice examples including one that he created for his stand at the Bloom Festival.

He then did a propagation demonstration with live material which aroused considerable interest among his audience. He dealt with propagation by division, easy for many ferns; vegetative propagation; using the little plantlets that appear at the ends of the stems of some species; and by spores. He uses Jiffy 7 pots which are soaked with boiling water and allowed to cool before sprinkling the spores on them. They are then put in a sealed container until the plantlets are big enough to handle.

Finally, we were able to examine a number of books and other items where ferns were used as decorations and Mike donated one attractive little book to us which fetched a decent price at the auction. Our thanks to him for this and for his excellent talk and demonstration.

## **Rannveig Wallis**

Rannveig spoke to us about what is involved in maintaining a bulb collection and in the course of her talk provided us with a wealth of information based on her and Bob's experience of looking after their

collection which was started in 1970. Plants that grow in the garden should remain outside, such as most narcissus, crocuses, tulips, scillas, fritillaria, corydalis, erythroniums and many others, but some have special requirements and need protection. The first thing to note is the plants natural habitat and then to contrast this with your local conditions and adjust as necessary. They have a number of greenhouses, frames and net-sided polytunnels which are used for those bulbs which cannot, for example, tolerate winter wet, or need a summer baking. In summer, shading is necessary and in very hot conditions some bulbs may even have to be covered by newspaper.

Clay pots are used for show plants, plastic for growing. Composts are mixed using propagating bark, coarse sand, potting grit, John Innes No. 2, leaf mould and Perlite. Avoid over-sharp grit which may damage your bulbs. Root growth is a good indicator of the suitability of a particular compost for a particular bulb. Use mesh rather than crocks in the bottom of pots. When potting up bulbs, questions arise as to how many, how deep, which way up? Bulbs like company, so they can be close together; depth of planting varies, but bulbs will tend to find their own level; planting the bulb right way up is important so examine it carefully to see which end the roots come from. If you are dealing with bulbs of different sizes put the smaller ones in a separate pot.

The *Leontocoides* section of corydalis needs special treatment. Use a very gritty compost and place barriers of broken crocks vertically around the bulb to prevent the stems running to the side of the pot and spoiling the display by having flowers only around the edge of the pot with the centre bare. Put lots of grit on top and give no water until late November or early December. These plants have won many Farrer Medals for them, three in 2018 alone. They are very beautiful and Rannveig showed us great shots of *Corydalis nariniana*, *C. popovii*, *C. darvasica* and *C. verticillaris*.

Bulbs should be repotted annually or every other year although some prefer less frequent repotting, and in this case the top level of compost only should be replaced. Repotting is normally done in June/July but with some species it should be done as soon as they die back.



Watering is dependant on conditions at the time, such as current and expected weather conditions, stage of growth, clay or plastic pot, pot size and whether plunged or not. To feed your bulbs use Miracle Grow for seedlings and Tomorite for mature plants. Seaweed fertilizer may be used to supply trace elements. You should try to encourage as long a growing season as possible.

Hardiness is an important consideration and we must bear in mind that snow melt bulbs are not hardy. In general bulbs do not like being frozen. Plunging the pots helps, e.g., concrete plunge beds ameliorate outside temperature by c. 3°C, but soil warming cables can be useful. At the opposite end some plants like a constant winter temperature and ideally should be stored in a fridge, hardly an option for amateurs.

Insect pests include Narcissus Fly, large and small, aphids, Lily Beetle - affects fritillarias as well as lilies - and bulb mites. In the absence of using toxic chemicals, vigilance, especially when repotting, is the only solution for the amateur. The same goes for fungal diseases: if your bulbs are affected soak them in a fungicide when repotting. A very weak solution of hydrogen peroxide may also be beneficial.

Propagation is best from seed although there are now fewer sources. Home saved seed is good. Some is sown as soon as ripe, otherwise in spring or summer depending on the plant. Rannveig puts a little compost over the seed before adding grit. The pots are left outside until germination and then brought inside and left for two years. They are potted on into larger pots after two years and left for another two.

Many bulbs increase vegetatively. Trilliums can be increased more quickly by removing the growing bud: this encourages the development of the remaining buds. Rannveig demonstrated the process of twin scaling emphasizing the importance of hygiene.

General maintenance requires that the glass in greenhouses and frames must be kept clean. Pots should be washed and soaked in a solution of Jeyes Fluid before re-use. Limescale on clay pots can be removed by soaking them in rain water for a week. Finally, it is important to keep records so that you can always tell the source of your plants.

I learned a lot from this fine talk and I have tried to cover the main recommendations for members who couldn't attend.

Although I have mentioned very few plants in the report Rannveig illustrated her talk with many images of beautifully grown bulbs.

### **Brian Burrow**

Brian's subject was 'The High Pyrenees - Jaca to Viella – Searching for Endemics' and was based on visits he made in the 1980's, 2015 and 2017. Since his earlier visits grazing has increased resulting in the destruction of some habitats. Brian's slides were of a high quality and whether depicting plants or landscapes did justice to both. The mountain views shown throughout the talk were superb and I'm sure tempted some in the audience to put the Pyrenees on their desirable mountains list. In order to avoid this report turning into a plant list I will mention only the more significant plants that Brian showed us as well as those that appealed particularly to me.

*Aquilegia pyrenaica* is a very good plant with large, rich blue flowers. The highly-scented *Dianthus monspessulanus* was widespread as was that Burren native, *Pinguicula grandiflora*. The rarer *P. longifolia* is very nice. The small neat *Potentilla alchemilloides*, growing in a crevice, has good white flowers and attractive silver-edged green foliage: it's on my wish list. Even out of flower, *Saxifraga longifolia* catches the eye and should be in every rock garden. *Leontopodium alpinum* can be straggly but the form Brian showed was tight and neat. *Androsace ciliata* is lovely and does well for Brian outside in a raised bed. White/cream-flowered, purple-tinged *Teucrium pyrenaicum* is nice and will do well outside too.

Brian showed some nice shots of different sempervivums looking happy in their natural habitat. *Pulsatilla alpina* is delightful but Brian finds it slow to establish. *Lilium pyrenaicum* has golden flowers and is taller in the wild than in gardens. The flowers of the familiar *Geranium cinereum* are beautifully marked. The small-white orchid, *Leuorchis albida*, is very nice. A perfect cushion of *Androsace vandellii* just coming into flower makes one wonder why it's so difficult to get it to a decent size in cultivation: some growers manage it though. *Gentiana burseri* is tall with attractive

creamy-yellow flowers. *Ononis cristata* is Brian's favourite ononis and one can see why, but *Crepis pygmaea* is one of his favourite Pyrenean plants, neat with, dare I say, yellow, dandelion-like flowers. Thymes are probably underused in the rock garden. Brian showed one, unidentified, that was completely smothered in pale pink flowers.

I am very partial to daphnes and now I have a new one to seek out, namely, *D. cneorum pygmaea* (See p. 40). It is small, highly scented and very floriferous. It is "a great plant, better than *D. petraea*, and easier" says Brian. *Adonis pyrenaica* is a beauty and *Veronica nummularium* covers itself in flowers and is another favourite. *Saxifraga bryoides* is a nice 'mossy' but you need to look out for a good flowering clone, and the same is true of *S. caesia*. *Ranunculus amplexicaulis* is "a good garden plant" and so is *Androsace carnea laggeri*. *Dianthus superbis* is nice with lovely frilled flowers but gets big in the garden. The diminutive, rare and beautiful *Aquilegia aragonensis* has relatively huge clear blue flowers but is not in cultivation. *Lonicera pyrenaica* and *Hyacinthus amethystinus*, are good in the garden, the latter, with white or blue flowers seeding itself around. *Vicia argentea* with pale mauve flowers and silver foliage is one of the rarest Pyrenean plants. Brian finished with a nice shot of *Ramonda myconi* in full flower. This was an absorbing talk about a region that we have not often visited. Brian said that the trip was inexpensive; the hotels were good and accommodation easily available provided bookings are made before the Spaniards go on holiday. What are you waiting for?

Brian called his second talk, 'Growing and propagating interesting alpines' and he delivered in spades. His passion for plants shone through in both talks and his knowledge is phenomenal. He is a very successful grower and plant breeder and generous with advice.

He gardens just north of Lancaster. Rainfall has increased in recent years and he now gets sixty to ninety inches of rain annually, most of it in winter. The soil is a heavy loam and the garden is on a south facing slope; -12°C is regular in winter. He has three greenhouses which look very well-tended and colourful. He stands the pots on grit which he waters up to 3mm above the grit and gives no more water until the grit is



One of Brian's greenhouses. (Photo: Brian Burrow)

dry; he does not plunge. *Primula allionii*, (he grows 200/300 seedlings each year) are kept under the staging. Good results are obtained from crossing these, but he selects carefully and keeps only two to three seedlings out of each year's batch. *P. a.* 'Judy Burrow' is a lovely pink with a large white eye. He uses a lot of grit to top-dress his pots and raised beds.

He grows a lot of plants from seed, this being the only way to get the rarer species. His seed compost is 20% bark; 20% JI1; and 60% grit. He leaves the seed pots outside in good light and this helps to minimize the growth of moss and liverwort. He starts taking cuttings in March, striking them in a gritty sand over compost. When seeds germinate, and cuttings take, he soaks the pots in water to which he adds Tomorite. Some pots he puts in a greenhouse, others are left outside.

He also does grafting of daphnes and other plants in March/April and again in September/October. He uses *D. tangutica* as the rootstock for

daphnes. It is essential that the scion is in contact with the edge of the rootstock. Black electric tape is used to bind the graft.

While giving us all this information Brian was showing us images of his garden and a mouthwatering selection of the plants that he grows. I will mention the highlights. He finds that many plants seed around in the thick dressing of grit; roscoes do so to the extent that it is almost a nuisance. A clump of a purple/blue form of *R. humeana* was lovely. *Antirrhinum molle* is four to six inches high and flowers all year round. He grows *Primula marginata* in the garden and when the plants get leggy, he cuts them back to about half an inch. *Androsace foliosa* has been growing outside for fifteen years. *A. villosa* does well in a raised bed as does *Saxifraga caesia*.

He grows *Oncocyclus* and Juno irises in pots, keeping them slightly moist in summer. *I. afghanica*, from seed, is a stunning plant. Oncos must have good roots by Christmas to flower well. He divides and repots them annually.

He grows a lot of crocuses and narcissus in the garden. The latter will flower in three years from seed, the crocuses in eighteen months to three years. *Scilla reverchonii* is a great plant, and good for showing. Where snowdrops are concerned Brian grows all the species but only a few of the named cultivars, *Galanthus* ‘Sophie North’, being his favourite.

*Phlox adsurgens* ‘Mary Ellen’ is excellent but not widely available. Among the Campanulaceae, Brian urges everyone to grow *C. fenestrellata istriaca* and *C. waldsteiniana*. *Edraianthus serpyllifolia* is one of the best of the fourteen species in that genus but for him *E. vesovicii* can’t be beaten.

*Dianthus* should be propagated from stem cuttings in early summer. Plants of the excellent *D.* ‘Rivendell’ are often not the real thing. *D. haematocalyx pindicola* along with *D. freynii* is very good in the garden and the latter crossed with *D. alpinus* is special.

Brian grows plants of the endangered *Cypripedium calceolus* to put back in the wild. *Cypripediums* need lots of food and water to thrive.

*Erythronium* 'White Beauty' flowers within three years from seed but some erythronium seeds are slow to germinate; like trillium seeds they should be sown fresh. A favourite is *E. umbilicatum*, which is beautiful.

*Viola vourinensis alba* is lovely as is the more difficult *V. albanica*. He grows the shrubby *V. delphinantha* in a raised bed. *Helichrysum sessilloides* is okay outside. *Gentiana verna* is short-lived – six to eight years – and the *G. acaulis* species do well in his garden and self sow.

Some of the high-altitude plants from North America, like the phloxes and penstemons, don't like soil. Brian grows them in 70% grit and 30% composted bark. *Phlox nana* subsp. *nana* is one of the easier ones and is a good garden plant. Penstemons should be grown outside.

*Eryngium glaciale* is easy from seed and is ideal in a trough or raised bed. Brian grows twelve different clones of *Daphne petraea* in his garden. A cross called 'Bonny Glen' is very good. His photo of the lovely yellow *Paeonia wendelboi* was much admired. *Corydalis nobilis* flowers for a month and is easy and hardy. Ramondas do not like being under cover. He has a good flowering clone of *Convolvulus boissieri* which is outside all year. I have never managed to get a flower on this plant. *Linum campanulatum* is good in the garden. *Callianthemum kernerianum* should not be disturbed. The secret of getting *Aquilegia jonesii* to flower is to grow it from seed, select two that flower and breed from them. *Eritrichium nanum* is notoriously difficult to grow. Brian succeeded with it in a raised bed with a high polythene cover in winter. He also succeeds with *Ranunculus glaciale* which he grows from seed.

This was a super talk, packed with information on many plants and lots of really good tips on cultivation. Brian's delivery is rapid-fire, and I hope I have managed to capture the essence of his lecture.

**Billy Moore**

### **Christmas Miscellany, 6 December**

Our annual pre-Christmas event was as enjoyable as ever with a very good turnout. Thanks to everyone who provided the mince pies and other goodies and a special thanks to Val and Ian who sourced and looked after the excellent driver-friendly mulled wine.

We had some first-class presentations about which, for space reasons, I can only give a brief mention. Jamie was up first with some images from a short visit that he and Amanda made last year to Chapelle St Trophime in the Gorge du Verdon in the south of France. These included wonderful views, nice plants, butterflies and other insects and an eagle. Fionnuala followed with an excellent three-part presentation, number one dealing with the making and planting up of a hyper tufa covered polystyrene trough with photos of the process from April to October last year. The trough looked great and Fionnuala (and Bernard) made it look so easy. Number two included photos from our long hot summer, the Burren visit and the garden at Kilquade House. Lastly, we heard about a visit to Utrecht University Botanic Gardens, magnificent, and some other gardens in Holland. Bernard showed us some stunning photos from Jimi Blake's garden, Blarney Castle – a must-visit if you haven't been, and Kilmacurragh. A number of the shots brought gasps from the audience. George brought us to the two-acre Branklyn Garden in Perth, now run by Jim Jermyn. His visit was in last October, so the outstanding aspect of the garden was the superb autumn colour. Although quite large, George felt that this was a garden that, compared to most public gardens, one could imagine owning. We got a bit of its history and saw a number of lovely plants, including colourful trees, brilliant autumn gentians, *Bolax gummifera* growing outside, and a very impressive spread of *Raoulia haastii*. This was an exemplary short presentation. Barbara showed us a number of photos of nice plants in her garden. Carl finished with a series of photos illustrating the extremes of the Irish weather in 2019. We also saw some plants from his garden, the most impressive being a rampant *Tropaeolum speciosum*. He then took us to the very colourful Pathanna Garden which looked super.

The amazing Gwenda brought along her stall of lovely cards and small gifts, and she had lots of customers.

This as always is the ideal event to bring to a close our programme for the year and we all headed home looking forward to 2019.

**Billy Moore**



*Daphne cneorum pygmaea* in the Pyrenees. (Photo: Brian Burrow) See p. 35.



*Fritillaria imperialis* in the Zagros. (Photo: Bob Wallis) See p. 29.



## FIXTURES

Thursday, 17 January, 8 pm, **AGM** followed by **Gary Mentanko**, 'Fire and ice - the shared Flora of Iceland and Ireland'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 23 February, 12 noon, **Annual Lunch**, preceded by **Fionnuala Fallon**, 'The Education of a Gardener'. Royal Irish Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire. A96 RC84. **Please note change of venue.**

Thursday, 14 March, 8 pm, **Neil Porteous**, 'Expanding the collection at Mount Stewart'. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS.**

Saturday, 23 March, 2 pm, **Local Show, members plant sale and workshop**. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Saturday, 6 April, 1.30 to 4 pm. **Dublin Group AGS Show**, Cabinteely Community College, Cabinteely, Co. Dublin.

Saturday, 27 April, **Ulster Group AGS Show**, Greenmount College, Antrim. BT41 4PS.

Thursday, 16 May, 8 pm, **Zoë Devlin**, 'Blooming Marvellous'. Rosemont School, Enniskerry Road, Sandyford. D18 A8N2. **Please note new venue.**

Saturday, 18 May, visit to **Timpany Nurseries and Garden**, Ballynahinch and the garden of **Hilary and William McKelvey**, Newry. Coach departs St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan at 8 am sharp.

Thursday, 17 October, 8 pm. **Joanne Ryan (Everson)**, ‘Fifteen years hard labour on Kew’s Rock Garden’. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS.**

Thursday, 7 November, 8 pm. **Martin Walsh**, ‘A Wicklow walled-garden – reimagined’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

15 to 17 November, **36th Alpine Weekend**, An Grianán, Termonfeekin, Co. Louth. Speakers: **Hester Forde, Tony Goode** and **Julian Sutton.**

Thursday, 5 December, 8 pm. **Christmas Miscellany.** St. Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 5.**

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

**Chairman and Webmaster:** Jamie Chambers  
**Hon. Secretary:** Barbara O'Callaghan  
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Patricia



Billy



Val



Fionnuala



Martin.



Gavin



Top *Dionysia lamingtonii*. (Photo: Bob Wallis. See p. 28. Bottom, *Lilium sherriffiae*. (Photo: Jamie Chambers) See p.23.