

# Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

NEWSLETTER NO. 23 Spring 2020



**In this issue: Autumn Conference Report  
Updates on Corrou and Baravalla  
The Himalayan Gardens and Sculpture  
Park**

**Above Picture: Rhododendron hookerii HECC 10035 at  
Baravalla. Picture by Matt Heasman**

## Editorial

As I write it is the first day of the Government's extreme measures to combat the spread of Covid 19 virus. Just a few weeks ago we were all looking forward to the Spring Conference, the garden visits, the SRS tour of gardens in Eire and the Scottish National Rhododendron Show. Sadly all has had to be cancelled, or postponed till next year in the case of the Conference and tour of Eire. As most of the articles in this Newsletter were penned before the start of this emergency, they do not necessarily reflect the changing situation.

In all of this we are lucky to have gardening as a hobby. As our President points out, our gardens are safe places if we stay more than two metres from our neighbour if he is working next to the boundary. This gives us exercise in the fresh air and is good for mental health. And the plants don't know there is anything amiss. They are growing and flowering as normal.

It has been a wet and relatively mild winter with only a handful of frosty nights here in the West of Scotland. Of course as happens, one of these was just last week and clobbered a number of rhododendron flowers that were emerging. Generally, after the bumper flowering year last year, rhododendrons seem to be having a rest this year with fewer flowers. A first flowering so far at Brecklet was on *R. argipeplum*, a bush kindly given to me by Chip Lima in 2018 as a well grown bush. I now want *R. succothii* to complete subsection Barbata! He also gave me a *R. hookeri* from the same collection that Matt Heasman has pictured in his article on Baravalla and on the front cover and I look forward to its flowers in due course.

Meanwhile read on and enjoy your Newsletter.

*John Roy*

# President's Very Short Report March 2020

**Ian Sinclair**

Definitely a troublesome period we are all living through. Wishing all our members a safe outcome during the months ahead.

Hopefully you will still be able to enjoy the peace and beauty of our incredible genus as its flowering season progresses. Provided one is sensible our gardens are safe places to be in and to visit. It was sadly necessary to postpone our Spring Conference.

The listing of the species held in collections throughout the country is a very important task. We congratulate all that are taking the time and effort to progress this noble task. It is great fun and we all learn so much. I hope we can make more progress this year, despite Coronavirus.

## Secretary's Notes

**John M. Hammond**

**Import and Export of Rhododendron Seed:** In recent years the Seed Exchange of the SRS has been well supported by purchases by ARS members on the European mainland, and towards the end of last year there was a request by these members for their seed to be mailed to them before 14<sup>th</sup> December 2019. This date is significant, as the 'Plant Health Regulation' (PHR) and 'Official Controls Regulation' (OCR) came into force in the UK on that date, being part of the EU 'Smarter Rules for Safer Food' Requirements.' It is important to understand that these requirements affect the import and export of **all** seed, including any such material from returning overseas expeditions, and DEFRA and the Scottish Plant Health will be following these requirements during the transition stages of Brexit; so, these requirements directly affect the conservation work of the RSCG regarding the acquisition of wild, or selfed, seed from sources overseas.

Under these Regulations, '.....all plants and living plants, including seed intended for planting will need to be accompanied by a Phytosanitary Certificate for import into the EU unless they are exempted from this requirement.' This includes parts of plants, i.e., cuttings, flower buds, etc. The items specifically exempted are pineapple, coconut, durian, banana and dates. Seed of *Rhododendron*, *Magnolia* and *Camellia* are not

exempted, even though they are not food items, as seed can be carriers of pathogens that may affect food production. In the case of Scotland, there is a need to protect seed potato stocks and pathogens carried on other seed are a concern in this regard. The entire basis of these Regulations is aimed to protect the production of food in a difficult and changing environment, at a time when the population of the world is increasing at an alarming rate. These Regulations also embody major changes to the Plant Passport requirements, and nurseries will need to register and comply with the new requirements, however small the nursery happens to be. Action will be taken regarding businesses that do not register or comply. Further requirements are to be introduced later this year, including quarantine arrangements. Given that the Regulations are directly connected with food safety, it likely that there will be little incentive to change the requirements when the UK leaves the EU.

Members of the ARS residing in mainland Europe will no longer be able to acquire seed from the ARS Seed Exchange, the Rhododendron Species Foundation, or from the SRS Seed Exchange, unless it is accompanied by a Phytosanitary Certificate. Obtaining a Phytosanitary Certificate for seed is more complicated than acquiring one for plants, as the seed must be tested. In the case of Scotland, my contacts at SASA have advised that they have a Seed Pathologist at the official seed testing station who will provide a Phytosanitary Certificate for an individual batch, or for multiple batches of seed, for export, and there is an hourly charge for the process. Importation of seed to the EU requires a Phytosanitary Certificate to have been issued by the overseas Plant Health Inspectorate prior to batches of seed being shipped.

It is clear from my incoming emails that this is a somewhat subjective subject, so the above notes seek to clarify the impact from a Scottish perspective, although for those members residing elsewhere in the UK they will face similar requirements, as set out by DEFRA. Your Editor, John Roy, will be pleased to receive your comments on this issue, which in some ways only complicates the situation in the aftermath of the Nagoya Convention.

**Clever Plants & Clever Technology:** Both my Father and Grandfather were gardeners, and they would have never believed what is happening in the plant world today, given recent research has established that plants can have an ability to be creative.

Scientists have ‘taught’ plants to take ‘selfie’ photographs, in a development that will make monitoring the wildlife in forests much easier. The first ‘plant selfie’ has been taken with the help of researchers from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), after they invented a camera activated by a small electronic charge generated by the plant’s natural energy.

Earlier in 2019, scientists installed microbial fuel cells in ZSL London Zoo's Rain Forest Life exhibit to power a plant to take its own photo, with the ultimate aim of using plants to power camera traps and sensors in the wild. The experiment was a success, with the plant able to take pictures of itself without further human intervention.

After spending the northern summer growing in strength, 'Pete' – a maidenhair fern – is able to photograph himself every 20 seconds. Scientists will refine the trial before setting-up an experiment in the wild. The battery works because plants produce sugars through photosynthesis. These sugars do not remain in the leaves but are transported throughout the plant to the stem and roots, where some are excreted as waste product.

Micro-organisms that naturally surround the roots break down the sugars, converting chemical energy into electrical energy, releasing electrons and protons, which are captured by an anode and a cathode, charging the fuel cell. When the cell is full the power is discharged by a super-capacitor and a photo is taken.

This technology is ground-breaking because it works in the shade. The batteries currently used for rain forest monitoring technology rely on solar power and this also reduces the need to replace batteries. The fuel cells have the potential to power devices for monitoring inhospitable and remote locations for data such as temperature, humidity, and plant growth, to aid understanding of climate change, habitat loss, and will revolutionise wildlife monitoring.

### **Future Events:**

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group & Scottish Rhododendron Society  
2020 Joint Autumn Conference: Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.**

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> & Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Theme: *'Conservation of Gardens is Key to Conservation of Plants'***

Planning and organisation by the RSCG for this event is making good progress in liaison with the RBGE. A wide-ranging and interesting group of speakers has been arranged for the lectures on Saturday. On the Sunday there will be a conducted tour of part of the rhododendron collection at the RBGE and a visit to Saughton Park for a conducted tour of the major conservation project being taken forward by the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society. Conservation of gardens goes hand-in-hand with plant conservation, they are reliant on each other for a successful outcome. An A4 declaration of interest proforma is included as an insert to this Newsletter and a Conference Registration Pack should be available in early-Spring.

Margaret Hammond, Conference Registrar

The Three Chimneys, 12 Cockey Moor Road, Starling, Bury, Lancashire BL8 2HB

Tel: 01617641116 or e.mail: [hammondsrhodies@supanet.com](mailto:hammondsrhodies@supanet.com)

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group**  
**2021 Spring Conference: Crown & Mitre Hotel, Carlisle (TBC)**  
**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021 (TBC)**  
**Theme, TBA**

In October 2009 the Group held its first Conference at the Crown & Mitre Hotel in Carlisle, so behind the scenes we are planning to make a return visit to The Border City and this will provide an opportunity for members in the South to attend. More details will be available later in the year.

Margaret Hammond, Conference Registrar

The Three Chimneys, 12 Cockey Moor Road, Starling, Bury, Lancashire BL8 2HB

Tel: 01617641116 or e.mail: [hammondsrhodies@supanet.com](mailto:hammondsrhodies@supanet.com)

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group & Scottish Rhododendron Society**  
**2021 Joint Autumn Conference: Venue TBA**  
**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> & Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021 (TBC)**  
**Theme: TBA**

Planning and organisation of this event will be taken forward by the SRS and details will be available early in the New Year.

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group**  
**2022 Spring Conference: Venue TBA**  
**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022 (TBC)**  
**Theme: TBA**

Planning and organisation of this event will be taken forward by the RSCG and details will be available in due course.

## **Autumn Conference 2019**

### **John Roy**

The 2019 Autumn Conference based in Pitlochry Hydro Hotel on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October was attended by some forty-four delegates. The theme was “Botanical Explorers in the Modern Era”. As usual with our Autumn Conferences it was a joint affair with the Scottish Rhododendron Society, with SRS doing the organisation this year under the auspices of David and Gloria Starck.

After a brief introduction I was the first speaker. I have been on twelve plant exploration trips in twenty-five years from Yunnan in 1994 to Sichuan in 2019. Some have been easy, some difficult, others crazy! I described some of the highlights of different journeys to China, Tibet, Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh ending my account with the 2009 adventure to the Mechuka valley in Arunachal.

After a short break, Julia Corden gave “The Hamish Gunn Memorial Lecture”. Julia is curator of the Explorers’ Garden in Pitlochry and has been on plant exploration trips to different areas of the Himalaya. Her main interests are alpine plants and she described the highs and lows of treks to Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, the highs being the beautiful plants and scenery, the lows the rain and leeches.

After lunch it was the turn of Richard Baines to tell of his adventures in northern Vietnam. Richard is curator at Logan Botanic Garden, an outreach of RBGE. He and his party ascended Vietnam’s highest mountain, Phan Xi Pang, at 13,000 feet. With collection of specimens and seed now difficult under the Nagoya Protocol, Richard obtained permission to collect and share information with his Vietnamese counterparts. He is glad to report specimens are doing well at Logan, some from fairly low elevations.

Assistant at Logan is Chris Parsons who described an expedition in spring 2016 to Yunnan and Sichuan. This was a trip focused mainly on alpinism. He visited some of the major mountain systems such as Cang Shan, Yulong Xue Shan and Tian Bao Shan in Yunnan and Zhe Duo Shan, Balang Shan and Wolong Shan in Sichuan.

After another short break “Gardens of the World with Brightwater Holidays” was the theme of Colin Crosbie’s talk. Colin has been in charge of many of Brightwater’s trips abroad to view beautiful gardens and he took us on a pictorial journey to South Africa, China, Japan and Europe, describing many of his favourites. He touched on some of the challenges involved in ensuring all participants have a great experience.

That concluded the proceedings for the day. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October we visited two superb gardens in the area.

## Craigowan

### Colin Whitehead

We visited Craigowan, Ian Jones' garden, on a rather wet Sunday morning. Ian had bought the property 31 years ago, with the substantial house overlooking a garden that sloped downwards to the south. The original garden had been planted with a good number of rhododendrons but over the years these had become too congested. Therefore Ian had leased some adjoining land and had moved into it some of the



rhododendrons from the original garden as well as planting others and some trees. The leased land had comprised a thin layer of soil over a thick bed of clay, so Ian had dug out the clay to a depth of about 4 feet and refilled with more top soil and incorporated field drains. The result was a sloping garden with grass paths leading downwards and around flower beds.



We were greeted on our arrival with tea and biscuits laid out on a table covered by what under more favourable weather conditions would have been a sun

**Above: Neat areas of planting with shrubs and herbaceous**

**Left: Members enjoying the garden in spite of the rain. *Cercidiphyllum* in the foreground. Autumn foliage smelling sweetly**



shade but which also served as an effective umbrella. Ian then led us on a tour of the garden, pointing out where the dieback fungus was killing some ash trees. We were led around the grass paths, crossing on bridges over small rivulets in full flow. Most of the moved rhododendrons were looking in good condition, though some of the plants in the original garden area were still growing into each other. The rhododendrons were interspersed with beds of *Meconopsis* and also groups of *Cardiocrinum* towering regally over the surrounding plants.

The rain was abating as we finished our tour so we were able to congregate more comfortably at the side of the house for a plant auction. Under the enthusiastic prompting of the auctioneer, John Roy, a varied collection of rhododendrons and other plants all disappeared to grace a good number of other rhododendron gardens.

## Explorers Garden

### Chris Parsons

After the thrilling plant auction and lunch at the Pitlochry theatre, we rounded off the day with a visit to The Explorers Garden, managed by Julia Corden. Overcast though the weather was, the rain managed to hold off, and we were welcomed, not only by Julia but also by an enticing autumnal display of *Colchicum*, *Cornus* and the fading heads of *Hydrangea paniculata* as we climbed the entrance ramp to the garden. Julia explained that the garden is maintained largely by a team of 42 volunteers and the great standard of horticulture on display says much about her skill in managing a garden with minimal resources. Also, commendable, was the commitment to gardening organically – the paths are weeded by flame gun – so no glyphosate!

The garden, as its name suggests, is a celebration of those plant explorers, well-known and more obscure, who hail from Scotland. Though not all of the figures represented in the garden were necessarily collectors, as is the case with William Forsyth, a founder member

**Julia Corden and Wang  
Liston at the entrance to the  
Explorers Garden**



**Ian Douglas telling a wee story  
about one of the explorers.**

**Photos by John Roy**

of the RHS; commemorated here by a sculpture of an ovary from a *Forsythia* flower, the genus that is named for him.

Paths meander through areas laid out in a mainly phyto-geographical way, with accompanying interpretation boards linking the plants with their collectors. Groves of young



*Araucaria araucana* were establishing not far from where our tour began; a nod to Archibald Menzies who of course was served the seeds for dessert on a trip to Chile, leading to their first UK introduction. Plantings of *Phormium tenax* and *Kniphofia caulescens* represent David Lyall and Francis Masson and the plant hunting they did in New Zealand and South Africa respectively.

In an area of dry-stone walls and criss-crossing paths dedicated to the Himalaya, grow over 40 taxa of *Meconopsis*, part of a Plant Heritage National collection of the big blue flowered species and cultivars. Around this point in the tour we were shown some of the garden's working area too, in the form of the impressive compost bays which are emptied and refilled on a four-yearly cycle, and doubtless help nourish the *Meconopsis*, especially in the increasingly dry summers of recent years.

The two most famous Scottish plant collectors each get their own pavilion in the garden. These being George Forrest and David Douglas. The latter was of course one of the most important collectors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and virtually started the UK forestry industry with his introductions. The David Douglas pavilion is a beautifully designed building, constructed mainly from Scottish sourced Larch and Douglas fir and the shape of its roof tiles take inspiration from the seeds of the Douglas Fir. The building as viewed from the path below looks akin to the prow of a ship; a reminder of the long sea voyages Douglas himself would have endured back in the day. The pavilion acts as a venue for various events and exhibitions and at the time of visiting, held a photography exhibition 'Plant Explorers in the Modern Era' sponsored by both the SRS and SRGC.

I look forward to revisiting this garden when the *Meconopsis* and *Rhododendron* are flowering!

## Corrou

### John Roy

Our usual “long weekend” at Corrou in the autumn was Friday 1<sup>st</sup> to Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November. The bulk of the survey of the rhododendron collection there had been completed but there were still a couple of areas to complete. There were also rhododendrons to plant.

It all started with RBGE sending David Purvis to the estate for about nine months to number every rhododendron with a small oval metal tag. Each number was added to a data base.



**John Hammond struggles through one of the areas yet to be dealt with**

Over a number of visits spanning several years the Group has, area by area, sorted out the rhododendron collection. It had become a victim of its own success with self

sown seedlings crowding out the original plantings of Sir John Stirling-Maxwell. Drainage was appalling with many plants’ roots in standing water.

Our initial advice was taken on board by Corrou Estate and work to mark important plants and those that should be removed commenced.

**Planting of *Rhododendron pseudochrysanthum***



**Two *Rhododendron tsariense* under the label *R. poluninii* AC were planted next to other *R. tsariense* to observe any differences**

Head of Forestry, John Sutherland, has been a huge help, sending in his contractors to cut out rhododendrons and establish drainage. Pruning has been carried out as paid work by our President Ian Sinclair.

Planting of rhododendrons mainly in subsections Lanata and Taliensia has been carried out. Corroul, being at a reasonably high elevation, gets proper winters often with considerable snow cover. These subsections



**Above: Wang Liston and Matt Heasman plant a *Rhododendron dicoanthum* ssp. *apodectum* AC**

**Left: Matt then takes GPS readings of the new plantings**



appreciate those conditions. Our wish is also to have a group of section Pogonanthum and a suitable site for this is being assessed. Sub-section Lapponica would also be a good contender for conservation at Corrour.

Once the clearance and pruning has been completed there will be an opportunity to review the work done but as we all know, it won't stop there. Gardening is an ongoing pursuit, with continuous monitoring of the plantings necessary.



**Top: Matt and Wang relax on a newly installed bench at the viewpoint on the top trail**

**Right: Matt helps with aluminium label manufacture**

**Bottom: Looking down Strath Ossian across Loch Guilbhinn. A sunbeam catches the Strath lighting an otherwise gloomy scene.**

**Photos in this article by John Roy**



# Baravalla in Spring 2020

**Matt Heasman**



**Magnolia Glade is dominated by  
*Magnolia campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata***

It's been a what seems like a long mild and very wet winter. Notably there has also been quite a few gales since the New Year as compared with the last few years. So I was prepared for the worst when making the first visit of the year.

Early March and for a change there were blue skies and it was even quite warm in the sun, perfect for working in the garden. I was meeting Harry Hutchison (Peter's Grandson) who was coming to help with the weekend work party. It was great news that he wanted to become involved in the garden and its future.

As usual, we checked the perimeter fence for any damage. This is always



**Hammering in new posts to mark  
trails to help visitors navigate**

**All pictures in this article are by  
Matt Heasman**



the first job of the year and I was sure that there would be some wind-blown damage. Much to my surprise there was only one small tree just starting to rest on the fence and a few smaller branches overhanging. With Harry's help these were soon cleared and the fence perimeter was all in order.



The ground was indeed wet but also not as wet as I had expected. I suppose the site is on a reasonable slope and south facing so the drainage is as good as it can be for Argyll. On looking around the interior of the garden it became clear that all was well in regard to wind blown damage. Nothing new and major was down. This is a great start to the year as it means we can concentrate on the scheduled work rather than clearing up any mess.



**Clearing up round the lawn. Top: Before. Above: After**

Later in the day the rest of the team joined us so we could get on with the work in hand. We had the place to tidy up for the up and coming Conference and some American visitors that were coming this year. Kartina Clow and Willie Campbell were continuing with the labelling project. Over the last few visits they have been working their way around the various garden areas and re-labelling all the plants with clearer and hopefully longer lasting labels that we have developed. Progress has been good and they were both keen to get on and cover as much as they could over the few days.

We had also purchased some poles that were going to be used to mark out the various routes we would be taking the visitors around in April and May. John Roy had also arrived and was set to work clearing an area where a limb of a large beech tree had blown down last autumn. Although out of the way it was quite a large area of tangled mess and if we could clear it there would be another large area for replanting as well



as allowing light in to the few plants that were already there.

Meanwhile Harry and I got on with starting to tidy up the main lawn circumference. The brambles and some of the shrubs have been left to their own devices for too many years in this area.

We hacked our way through some dead and overgrown *Hebe* and

**Fallen beech branches to be cleared up. This necessitates sawing into lengths suitable to go on the bonfire. The larger bits can now be transported by Muffin the Kawasaki Mule to John Roy's trailer to be used as firewood at home.**



cleared around a spreading Juniper/Cypress tree. All the cut brush and brambles were being burned on site and the timbers were being piled into small wildlife log piles where possible. It always amazes me how well green brambles burn on a fire. It's a sort of rough justice for the mess they make of my arms. The weather was doing its bit as well, Saturday was fair until about 2:30pm when the rain came

on quite heavy (as forecast).

John also had made great progress in his area. Sunday turned out to be dry all day and John and I carried on clearing the timber. In no time at all we had a reasonable fire



**Right: *Rhododendron hookeri* HECC  
10035**

**Below left: *R. subansiriense* from the  
original introduction in 1965**

**Below right: First flowering at Baravalla  
for *R. lanatoides***

going that became one of those fires that you cannot feed fast enough. This is exactly what is needed when you have a large amount to burn. Much progress was made during the day and at the end of the weekend a good half of the area had been cleared.



We had made good progress over the few days. Surprisingly the weather was kind and this allowed us to work on. When you are working in the garden you sometimes forget to take the time to have a look around. I had a special plant that I wanted to see if it was in flower. The HECC 10035 collection of *Rhododendron hookeri*. It had its first flowering a few years ago and Peter Cox was keen to see if it was flowering again. We were in luck, it was and was pretty impressive as well.



Have a look at the pictures of what was in flower. Remember if you want to come and join a work party weekend just let me know. Everyone is welcome.



# Himalayan Gardens & Sculpture Park

## The Hutts, Grewelthorpe, North Yorkshire

[www.himalayangarden.com](http://www.himalayangarden.com)

### Jenny Wells

2020 holds a few changes ahead for The Hutts, firstly we are delighted to welcome our new head gardener Stephen Ward to the team. Stephen has a strong background in estates management and already his enthusiasm for getting projects done and supporting his team is paying dividends... I'm certain he will have us all whipped into shape in no time at all!

Winter tasks included:

- clearing away numerous tree falls and wash outs brought by the seemingly relentless February storms,
- an extensive program of path improvements throughout the gardens,
- thinning and careful replanting of the rhododendrons from congested areas,
- planning for a new hydrangea collection,
- redesign and planting of the herbaceous borders, and let's not forget some serious weeding in preparation for our extended open season [10th April-1st November]

As for my 'pet project' at The Hutts, I'm delighted to pick up on Phil's great work in applying for National Collection of Rhododendrons subsection Fortunea.

It's my hope that focusing on one subsection initially will help provide clarity on the extent in which it is practical to add additional information/fields to our current database for the entire collection..... a daunting project as I'm sure many can appreciate!

In terms of subsection Fortunea, to add fields such as propagation status/current location of propagated material is an element I am hugely excited about. Several species already have duplicate plants from cuttings taken some 7 or 8 years ago establishing well in newly developed areas of the garden. In 2019 we air and ground layered a number of the Fortunea subsection species we have found to be less cooperative to root from cuttings. We look forward to seeing the results in due course and hope to document those results and continue our propagation trials.

#### **Pictures of The Hutts by Jenny Wells**

**Clockwise from top right: *Rhododendron huianum*, *R. davidii*, Cuttings of *R. davidii*, Successful rooting, *R. asterocnoulum*, *R. calophytum* var *openshawianum***



## Useful Contact Details:

**President: Ian Sinclair, Balquharrie Cottage,  
Muthill, Crieff, PH5 2BP  
Phone: 07768 002288  
Email: [iwjs@btinternet.com](mailto:iwjs@btinternet.com)**



**Secretary: John Hammond, The Three Chimneys,  
12 Cockey Moor Road, Starling, Bury, BL8 2HB  
Phone: 0161 764 1116  
Email: [hammondsrhodies@supanet.com](mailto:hammondsrhodies@supanet.com)**



**Membership Secretary: Anne Davidson,  
Oliver, Tweedsmuir, Biggar, ML12 6QN  
Phone: 01899 880278  
Email: [annevdavidson@gmail.com](mailto:annevdavidson@gmail.com)**



**Editor and Treasurer: John Roy,  
Brecklet House,  
Ballachulish, PH49 4JG  
Phone: 01855 811465  
Email: [john.roy2@btopenworld.com](mailto:john.roy2@btopenworld.com)**



**© RSCG 2020**

**The Rhododendron Species Conservation Group is a  
Registered Scottish Charity No. SC038113**