



# Primroses

THE QUARTERLY OF THE AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY

SUMMER 2005

VOL. 65

No. 3



**Ehret's Auricula**  
**The Italian Dolomites**  
**Great Explorers and Primula**

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The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

Volume 65 No 3

SUMMER 2005

The purpose of this Society is to bring the people interested in *Primula* together in an organization to increase the general knowledge of and interest in the collecting, growing, breeding, showing and using in the landscape and garden of the genus *Primula* in all its forms and to serve as a clearing house for collecting and disseminating information about *Primula*.

President's Message, by Ed Buyarski	5
Paul Held's Garden - by Amy Olmsted	7
Finding Primroses: Great Plant Explorers by Judith M. Taylor MD	9
Ehret's Auricula by Maedythe Martin	23
In the footsteps of Farrer; Hiking in the Dolomites by Matt Mattus	28

### About the Covers

Front Cover: A colony of Primulaceae member *Soldanella alpina*, photographed in Switzerland and kindly submitted by Thomas Huber, Neustadt, Germany.

Back Cover: *Primula farinosa* in the Dolomites. Photo by Matt Mattus

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Summer snow in the Alps. The precious Snowbell flowers of a rare white form of *Soldanella minima* as photographed by famed alpinist, Franz Hadacek.

This summer issue of PRIMROSES focuses on Plant Exploration, in all of its expressions - from the historically important plant explorers to exploring art in a museum.

### PRIMROSES • The Quarterly of the American Primrose Society

#### Editor

**Matt Mattus**  
26 Spofford Road  
Worcester, MA 01607  
mmattus@charter.net

#### Editorial Committee

**Robert Tonkin**  
**Judy Sellers**  
**Ed Buyarski**

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#### EDITORIAL DEADLINES

Winter issue	December 10
Spring issue	March 10
Summer issue	June 10
Autumn issue	September 10

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Vice President	<b>Judith Sellers</b> 300 Frank Youngs Road Unadilla, NY 13849	jsellers@mkl.com
Secretary	<b>Michael Plumb</b> 9341 Kinsley Crecent Richmond, BC V7A AV6 (604) 241-0498	mp-9341-rp@iniserve.com
Treasurer/Membership	<b>Julia Haldorson</b> P.O. Box 210913 Auke Bay, AK 99821 (907) 789-5860	julia-haldorson@ak.net

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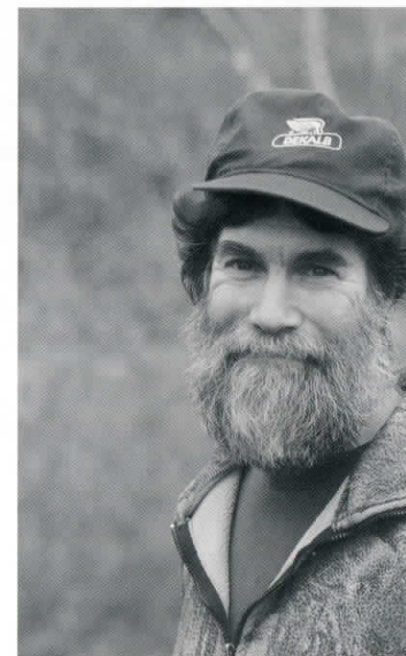


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Through 2008	<b>Linda Bailey</b> 1720 Highway 20 East Collville, WA 98114	lbailey@plix.com
	<b>Susan Gray</b> RR #2 South Ohio, NS B0W 3E0 Canada	briarwood@ns.sympatico.ca
Through 2007	<b>Arlene Perkins</b> 580 Perkins Rd. Montpelier, VT 05602	arlnprmsldy@aol.com
	<b>Mark Dyen</b> 132 Church Street Newton, MA 02158	
Through 2006	<b>Richard Austin</b> 10 Forestside Gardens Poulner, Ringwood, Hants United Kingdom BH24 1SZ	dreamgreenuk@yahoo.co.uk
	<b>Rodney Barker</b> 49 Woodcliff Road Newton Highlands, MA 02461	rodney@justice.com

## President's Message

ED BUYARSKI



It's summer in Alaska but the days are getting shorter. *Primula florindae* are still blooming and the survivors of the crop of *P. capitata* that I grow every year have also begun to bloom. I'm collecting seeds for the APS Seed Exchange and hope that you are too. We always need a wide range of different species and varieties but are overwhelmed by the quantity of common *P. japonica* that we receive for which there is little demand. Please collect, dry and clean your seeds well, label them and send to Robert Tonkin with the Juneau Primrose Chapter or our overseas coordinators so that they can get them to us in timely fashion. You might also sow some of these seeds immediately as some will germinate quickly-auriculas especially- to give a head start on your next crop.

This summer started out even warmer and dryer than last year but has reverted to a more normal moist season for which the slugs are grateful. I have

been going out in the evenings with my spray bottle of ammonia and water to thin out the population and have racked up an appalling total that will only go up. I spare the native giant timber slugs but there are a lot of other smaller species, many imported, that do most of the damage in the garden. I found a new bait to lure them out of the underbrush-corn gluten. This is a by product of corn oil processing and its recommended use is as a pre-emergent weed killer that is organic and releases nitrogen as it breaks down. I sprinkle it on the soil in small openings among plants and within 15-30 minutes slugs crawl out to feed on it so I can return to spray them with the ammonia that does them in. The next night, more slugs appear for the corn gluten and to feed on their dead relatives-sort of a vicious circle.

I understand that in most of the Midwest and Eastern parts of the country you have the opposite problem of heat and dry weather and I hope that your primroses are surviving to bring you joy next spring.

From the ballot results of the election, I will be your President for one final term-I hope my replacement starts his or her campaign immediately! Judy Sellers is our new Vice President, Michael Plumb is Secretary and Julia Haldorson continues as Treasurer. Our new Board members are Linda Bailey, Susan Gray and Mark Dyen elected as a write in candidate-congratulations to all.

Stay cool if you can and keep your garden cleaned up so that pests and disease do not get a foothold.

Ed

## GARDEN TOUR

# Paul Held's Garden

AMY OLMSTED

The day was perfect for a walk in a woodland garden. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, the bugs weren't biting for once, but most importantly, the *Primula sieboldii* were blooming! As we walked down the driveway the drifts of *P. sieboldii* in many shades of pink and lavender and pure white stopped us dead in our tracks and out came the cameras.

Paul Held, the president of the American Sakurasoh Society, then welcomed us into his home for lunch. While we ate a quick meal under the pergola, he gave a short history of his gardens as well as his reasons for growing Sakurasoh (*Primula sieboldii*): mainly for their hardiness in the harsh New England winters, but also for their beauty so early in the spring and their habit of going dormant in summer to allow other plants to shine.

His favorite way of propagating *P. sieboldii* is by seed in styrofoam boxes from the local supermarkets. After filling them with potting mix, grit and seed he leaves them outdoors all winter until they germinate in spring. And, boy, do they germinate! There were so many boxes in the nursery area and all were full of seedlings, some already in bloom!

Paul first discovered Sakurasoh on a New Hampshire trip many years ago when he was given a division which he grew on. He began collecting seed from his own plants and from contacts in Japan and elsewhere. Eventually he planted a large garden of at least one hundred different types of sieboldii, now known as 'Held's Hundred'. There are approximately five hundred known



cultivars of *P. sieboldii* and Paul is now trying to grow and maintain the largest collection in the world, presently up to about 200 cultivars. The American Sakurasoh Society grew out of Paul's desire to share his collection of seed and his love of this fabulous plant.

After lunch Paul gave us a personal tour of his gardens, complete with a huge amount of cultural information on many plants: not just primulas, but many other beautiful woodland plants, such as *Aquilegia 'flabellata' nana*, an easy blue and white Japanese columbine; and some not so desirable plants like *Ranunculus ficaria*, a pretty but rampant spreader. He also shared with us the solution to the problem of *P. sieboldii* going dormant in summer, causing you to wind up with a gaping hole in the garden that needs filling without disturbing the resting *P. sieboldii*. He plants *Hibiscus moscheotus*, an herbaceous perennial with huge flowers. The plants emerge late in the season so they don't compete with the primulas and flower well into the fall, until frost. What a great idea!

Everywhere we looked, there were drifts of *P. sieboldii*, *Asarum*, *Trillium*, and *P. kisoana*, with assorted *Arisaema* (Jack-in-the-Pulpit) species peeking through the masses of flowers. *Adiantum pedatum* (Maidenhair Fern) were unfurling their fronds in the dappled shade, *Claytonia caroliniana* (Spring Beauty) had naturalized in the lawn and was coming up everywhere, while in the sunshine *Opuntia* (Hardy Cactus) draped over the rocks. All are fed by underground springs to keep them moist and happy. There were fresh sprouts appearing everywhere to let us know that in a few weeks time the hillside would be covered in many other blooms, including the many Azaleas and *Rhododendron* just about ready to burst into flower.

The end of the tour came much too soon, but Paul let us know that he would be at the show with a large selection of bare root rhizomes of many of the *Primula* we had seen in his gardens, as well as many others for all newly signed on members of the American Sakurasoh Society, plus a few potted plants for sale. I'm sure that he acquired more than a few new members after such a wonderful introduction into the world of *Primula sieboldii*, myself included!

## Finding Primroses: Great Plant Explorers

JUDITH M. TAYLOR MD

Primroses may be found in many countries but they have such a long history in the British Isles that they are part of everyday speech. We lead someone "down the primrose path", meaning that we plan to seduce them. Benjamin Disraeli, that wily old Victorian prime minister, founded the Primrose League, an organization for young politicians, symbolizing youth and promise.

*Auricula*, (*Px pubescens*) arrived in Britain at the end of the 16th century, possibly carried by the wave of Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France. The red primrose, *P. rubra*, was introduced in the mid-18th century and led to an explosion of new forms. (1) From Britain and Europe the familiar varieties travelled to America with the great migrations of the past three hundred years.

The name is a corruption of "Prima Rosa", the first flower of spring. This is a genus with 430 species known at present, subdivided into seven (or eight) sub-genera to make them more amenable. The largest number of species are in the Sino-Himalayan region, approximately 78%. The United States has about 16% and Europe 6%. They are not found in southern latitudes.

The small number of native species in Europe may be a little misleading. (2) Centuries of selection, mostly by poor workingmen as a hobby and release from backbreaking toil, had resulted in exquisite varieties of polyanthus, (*P. veris x P. vulgaris*) and auricula in England and on the Continent. (3) The "florists" made excellent use of what they had.

Highly developed forms of *Primula sinensis* were grown for hundreds of years in China as was *P. sieboldii* in Japan. These plants were not known outside their native countries, nor did the highly civilized Chinese coastal





Primula cawardiana, and *P. dickieana* taken in the wild by Frank Kingdon Ward.  
Photo courtesy of Kenneth Cox.

communities have any idea of the riches in their western hinterlands. This phase lasted until the mid-nineteenth century when it became possible to explore for plants in China, Japan, Burma, Nepal, Bhutan and the other Himalayan countries. China became accessible in 1843, and Japan in 1854.

Even then it took a long time before change occurred. Northern India had been available to the British for two hundred years, but travel was extremely difficult and often dangerous.

#### Reaching the West

The train of events from observing a plant in the wild to reaching Western nurseries is long, complex and arduous. Many of the remarkable early explorers in the 1860s, such as the French missionaries, were primarily botanists. They made careful notes, preserved specimens and seeds for scientific observation, but were not thinking of the gardener. The idea of seeking new plants specifically for commerce arose later.

The pantheon of primula collectors may be said to consist of Joseph Hooker, Ernest H. Wilson, Frank Kingdon Ward, Reginald Farrer, George Forrest, Heinrich von Handel-Mazzetti, Frank Ludlow, and George Sherriff. Other men (and it usually was men) contributed and should be remembered with

respect but these were the outstanding figures.

They all overcame horrifying obstacles, ranging from hostile and inhospitable local people, lack of food and shelter much of the time, impossible terrain, dreadful parasites, diseases of every kind and in one case, a 9.2 earthquake. Philip Short, an Australian botanist, has collected excerpts from many diaries and published an anthology "In Search of Plants" which tells much of this story. (4)

Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, 1817 – 1911, was the first European collector to return with a large number of new primula species, though earlier explorers, such as Nathaniel Wallich, David Don, J. F. Royle and William Griffith had all been to the Himalayan endemic regions before him. Richards notes the slow incremental expansion of primula species in the British Isles before the first world war. (5)

It was a happy chance that Hooker found *P. malacoides* and *P. obconica* very early. Both of them lent themselves to rapid and successful hybridizing, and were very popular as house plants.

The heyday of exploring for plants and the discovery of new primula was the hundred years between 1850 and 1950. Since then, there have been successful exploration and wonderful discoveries but not on the heroic scale of the earlier expeditions.

Joseph Hooker was the son of Sir William Hooker, the great botanist and horticulturist who put Kew Gardens back on its feet after the death of Sir Joseph Banks in 1820 had left it without a leader or protector for almost twenty years. (6)

Joseph was the second of five children and the apple of his father's eye. He was trained as a naval surgeon and almost immediately left on voyages of exploration. Hooker prepared the first flora of the Antipodes, including parts of Antarctica. He travelled in great style in India as befitting an English overlord, but the king of Nepal did not hesitate to throw him in prison for six weeks on a trumped-up charge. Hooker's expeditions were paid for by Kew, in other words the British Government.

Ernest H. Wilson, 1872- 1930, was born in Chipping Hamden in Gloucestershire, and may be one of its most famous sons. (7) He was apprenticed at the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew and very quickly rose in the horticultural world.



The prospect of just doing gardening was not really attractive. He wanted a better life. The English class system was still very repressive however and he had few options. To improve his chances Wilson took extra classes in English and technical subjects, hoping to become a botany teacher.

His zeal and initiative were noted by Sir William Thistleton-Dyer, Joseph Hooker's son-in-law and director of Kew in his turn. When Sir Harry Veitch, owner of the great Victorian nursery, was looking for an enterprising young man to go to China and find *Davidia involucrata*, Thistleton-Dyer recommended Wilson.

Veitch first sent him to the Arnold Arboretum near Boston, to be briefed on plant hunting in Asia by Charles Sprague Sargent. Wilson and Sargent became firm friends. In the end, Sargent lured him away from Veitch to become first his associate and after Sargent's death, Keeper of the Arnold Arboretum in his turn.

Wilson was an indefatigable plant collector, starting in China in 1899 and visiting all the major Asian countries more than once. His books reflect his knowledge and skill. Wilson survived all the difficulties of the dangerous foreign lands but died in a car accident in upstate New York.



Frank Kingdon Ward

Photo courtesy of Oliver Tooley, Frank Kingdon Ward's grandson.

Frank Kingdon Ward, 1886 – 1958, overlapped Wilson to some extent but came from the other end of the social spectrum. (8) His father was professor of Botany at Cambridge University and he was a graduate of that university himself. From childhood, he had wanted to be an explorer and plant collector.

Although he came from the upper class, the family was poor and he took the first job he could find, to earn a living and be in Asia. Teaching little boys in Shanghai was not appealing but it very quickly led to him being recruited

by A. K. Bulley, the Liverpool cotton millionaire who was supporting plant exploration for the nursery he started as an avocation.

Reginald Farrer, 1880 – 1920, was only forty when he died of pneumonia in China. (9) He too came from the upper class. His father was a rich Yorkshire dalesman and his mother a cousin of the Sitwells, great Yorkshire landowners and literary geniuses. Farrer suffered acutely from having a harelip. It affected his social behavior, making him superficially scornful and brittle but actually deeply vulnerable to slights and cruel teasing.

Going to China, adopting native dress and making his name in plant collecting and the rock garden movement, were all balm to a wounded spirit. Farrer's books were widely read in spite of the "purple prose" and often misleading statements about plants. "The English Rock Garden" may be the best known, but "On The Eaves Of The World" has also been very popular.

George Forrest, 1873 - 1932, epitomised the hardworking, strongly motivated poor Scottish youth who was determined to make something of himself and escape the grinding poverty of his upbringing. (10) Many such men are to be found in the annals of plant exploration, out of proportion to their numbers in the population. Some diehards say that the British Empire ought really to be called the "Scottish Empire".



George Forrest on his horse photographed at the Moongate of the China Inland Mission in Dali (Tali) probably in 1904 or early 1905.

Photo courtesy of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.





Frank Ludlow is seen holding the umbrella.

By Permission, The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Forrest held a very low level position at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, but used every moment to improve himself. He too caught the eye of his superiors. When Bulley came looking for a man to travel in the East and collect new plants, Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour, the director of the garden, recommended Forrest. It was an excellent choice. Forrest selected the south western section of China close to the Tibetan border as his territory. He trained the local men, and organized them into teams which fanned out over a very wide area. They covered far more ground than he could as a single individual. A further advantage was that their presence did not excite the hostility that foreigners evoked.

Forrest had an "industrial" approach long before this was common. He sent back prodigious quantities of whatever he found. Rhododendron was his great passion but his contribution to primula was staggering too.

When Ward first appeared in the area he chased him off very roughly. No one could collect in his patch. He had nothing but contempt for Ward, an ignorant, soft-handed college boy in his eyes. It turned out Forrest was hopelessly incorrect about Ward's potential but he felt very threatened.

Heinrich von Handel-Mazzetti, 1882- 1940, was born in Vienna, to an Austrian father and Italian mother. (11) His interests were primarily botanical. He did not introduce plants into cultivation the way so many of the other did, but he was an immense authority on Asian primula.

At the Fourth Primula Conference in 1928, Handel-Mazzetti presented a paper on the natural habitats of Chinese primula. He also offered useful scientific insight into the reason so many new species were found in the south western region of China and neighboring Tibet. The north-south disposition of the mountain chains, the great river valleys between them and the effects of the Ice Ages were all part of his thesis.

Some of his work resulted from his enforced stay in China at the end of the first world war. He was not allowed to travel or leave the country.

The travels of Frank Ludlow, 1886 – 1972, and George Sherriff, 1898 – 1967, took place between 1933 and 1949, the year the Communists seized power in China. (12) Foreigners were no longer welcome to roam around. The two men made seven trips in all and sent back about 130 varieties of primula.

Ludlow was a college teacher in British India. He started out as a passionate amateur ornithologist but ended up as a plant taxonomist once he retired back to England. His collections often contained the skins of rare birds as well as



plants.

George Sherriff was a professional soldier, skilled at logistics. He too was an enthusiastic naturalist. Their journeys were the exception to the rule. Sherriff made sure they had adequate supplies, even sending men on ahead to plant vegetable seeds, so they would have fresh produce on the way back. There were many things outside his control, such as the leeches which made them very miserable.

Until the mid-20th century, protecting the precious cargo of plants on the long and hazardous journey back to Europe was fairly hit or miss, even with the Wardian case. Sherriff came up with the idea of stowing his material next to the refrigerators on the great ocean liners. His ultimate stroke was dispatching them by air. No one had ever done this before.

It is rather sad that in spite of the great care expended on the safe passage, very many of the new species did not thrive in Britain or Europe. Time and again, the author of *A Quest of Flowers*, based on Ludlow and Sherriff's diaries, notes that a species would flower briefly but not set seed. Sherriff himself laid out a wonderful garden when he retired to Ascreavie in Scotland, but even he could not coax the primula into surviving.

The best Asian primula came from high altitude with eternal rain. The Highlands of Scotland are pretty damp but not on the Himalayan scale.

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George Forrest standing in a Moongate.

By Permission, The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.





A well designed pergola (above) in the Connecticut garden of Paul Held. (below) Styrofoam Fish and grape Boxes from the local supermarket used as *Primula sieboldii* seedling containers in Paul Held's garden. Covers provide protection from New England's winter snows and driving rain.

## Pins + Thrums

noteworthy bits



### Kevock Gardens Introduces New Primula Species.

Kevock Gardens in England has long been a source for many unusual primula plants. This autumn, they are introducing two new species that are rarely offered for sale. One, is a form of *P. bellidifolia* which they feel may prove to be a new sub-species. Growing in woods at around 4000 m, it has much bigger rosettes of leaves, like many members of the Muscarioides section, but they are thickly covered with farina on the underside. In this section this is only found in *P. bellidifolia* sub-species hyacinthina, which is known only several hundred kilometres to the west. It has rather tall, farinose stems carrying large, conical clusters of pale violet, scented flowers, these flowers are reminiscent of those of *Primula flaccida*, although they are somewhat smaller. [www.kevockgarden.com.uk](http://www.kevockgarden.com.uk)

### Bumblebees vs. Humans

Commercial production of hybrid Primula seeds is usually dependent on hand pollination. A recent study by some major European growers describe an experiment in which various bumblebee species were studied for their pollination efficiency within closed greenhouses. The best results were obtained with *B. pascuorum* queens; a few queens together, when still in their solitary phase, produced a seed production of 50% as compared to the hand-pollinated control.



### Measuring Petal Shape Variation of *Primula sieboldii*

In Japan, the popularity of *Primula sieboldii* reaches deep into cultural and fundamental beliefs, with some Sakurasoh cultivars dating back to the Edo period (1600's). Today there are hundreds if not thousands of crosses, each, it appears, with subtle differences.

A recent study examines the shape of each petal by establishing coordinates and other criteria in an effort to better define commercial varieties. Results concluded that there are two factors that affect overall shape. Within a flower, the major source of the symmetrical elements are primarily genotypic and asymmetrical elements are strongly affected by environment.





Scenes from the Italian Dolomites in June: Opposite: *Primula farinosa* blooming a mown ski slope on the Sassa Lungo, Val Gardena. *P. minima* found growing under *Daphne petrea* at 7,000 feet. View of hikers on Marmolata, the second highest mountain in the Italian Alps.

This page, clockwise: *Soldanella alpina*, a lone specimen found on the Bindleweg trail at Passo Pordoi, Italy. The rare Borage relative *Eritrichium nanum* growing on a limestone cliff at 9,000 feet in the Italian Dolomites. Many variations in the populations of *P. farinosa* exist, with this one demonstrating a darker color form. All photos: Matt Mattus





## Ehret's Auriculas

MAEDYTHE MARTIN

Everyone knows by now that I am keen on striped auriculas. And once you are hooked, if you are like me, you want to know where they came from and what they looked like back then. This October, when I was visiting Terry Mitchell in England, he mentioned a collection of slides that had surfaced. They belonged to Ruth Duthie. Many of you know her little historical book, *Florists' Flowers and Feasts*, now unfortunately out of print. It appears Ruth collected many images of auriculas and other botanical prints in the course of her historical research. And among these are some – you guessed it! – striped auriculas.

Four slides of auriculas from the 1740s are of special interest. They were painted by George Ehret, a superlative botanical artist. He paints his subjects in exacting detail, and yet with flair. He was born in Germany in 1728, but ended up spending much of his life in England. Ehret traveled a number of times in his early twenties, at one time going to England, where he met Sir Hans Sloane, a physician and collector of plants, and Phillip Miller, curator of the newly established Chelsea Physic Garden. Miller became famous in his day as a great botanical horticulturalist, and of more interest to Ehret, had a sister-in-law, Susan Kennet, whom Ehret met and then married in 1738. He spent the rest of his life in England, and thanks to his brother-in-law at the Chelsea Garden, had a ready supply of exotic plants to paint.

Many of his paintings are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, where they are available to view, if you are fortunate enough to get to London, and make an appointment. Ruth has collected these four images, and we are fortunate to





have “pictures” of what auriculas of the 1740s looked like. The four are:

‘Duke of Montague’ appears to be a stripe with a slaty-purple ground, and pale green stripes. The plant sold at the time for 10 pounds – a lot, when you think the annual salary of a nurseryman was 18 pounds a year. (This bit of info thanks to Derek Parsons, of whom we shall hear more presently.)

‘Duke of Cumberland’ a red and pale green stripe, with some white meal stripes in there too, I think. Painted about 1740 (according to Oscar Moreton’s historical tome, *The Auricula*) it shows a presentable striped auricula by today’s standards, with a nicely rounded outline.

‘Glory of Chiltern’ painted about 1740 is a bold striped auricula, clear yel-

low stripes on a black background. Or are they black stripes on a yellow-gold background? Allan Hawkes, to whom we are indebted for reproducing the modern stripes, very much wants to see a recreation of this particular one. Derek Parsons has been aiming for just such a plant, as well, but the colour combination is elusive.

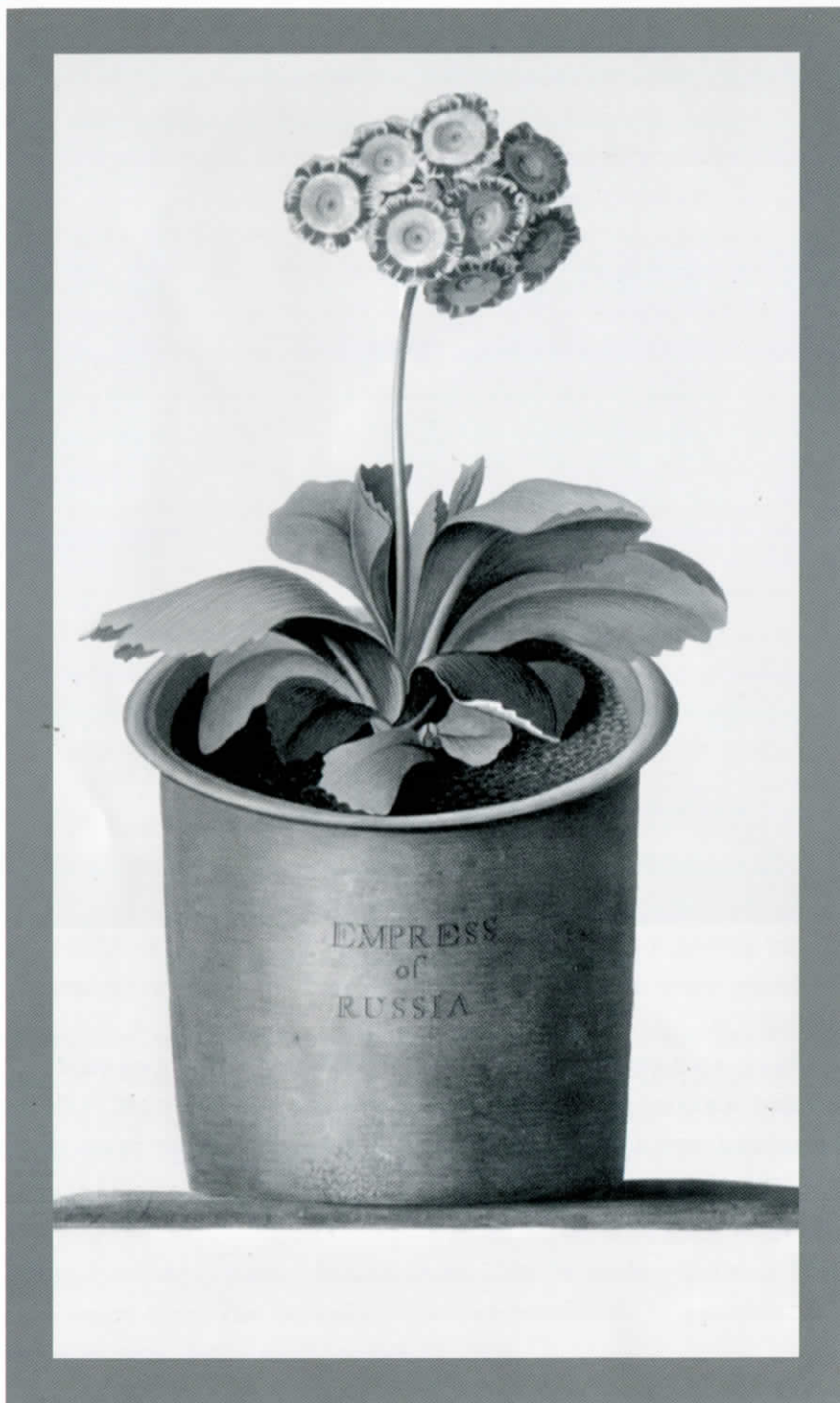
‘Empress of Russia’ shows an edged auricula. Painted also about 1740, it is the precursor of English auriculas to come, as the florists fancied the green edge and set about growing edged plants to the exclusion of the stripes. By the end of the century, lists of auriculas grown include no stripes.

A botanical artist of the time would find work with a patron, a wealthy person interested in the artistic description of the plants. Often they would be physicians, who also were botanists. Ehret’s first series of drawings, 500 of them, were for an apothecary in Regensburg. Yet the auriculas are not included in any collections of commissioned paintings. Perhaps Ehret had a personal affection for these plants. They may have been prize-winners from the newly established flower shows. There is little detail about these paintings, but at least we get to see some striped auriculas from 1740. The information on Ehret’s life I found in a slim volume from the Victoria and Albert Museum, called *Ehret’s Flowering Plants*. It is in their series, “Natural History Illustrators.”

We are fortunate today to have some of these striped auriculas that went out of fashion in the 1800s. They have been re-created for us, two centuries later, by Allan Hawkes in England, and Derek Parsons in Wales. Allan spent 15 years getting a respectable stripe, and Derek has added to Allan’s work, introducing many color combinations and beautiful plants to the array now available.

I always get a great lift out of holding a lovely modern striped auricula and think that someone in England in the 1740s held a similar plant. I do share their interest, and it is a bit of a miracle that a similar flower exists all these years later. And without Ehret’s precise illustrations, we wouldn’t be able to compare then and now.





Note:

All of Ruth Duthie's slides including the four by Ehret are available to view on-line at the Northern Auricula web site, [www.auriculas.org.uk](http://www.auriculas.org.uk) and then look at the Picture Gallery, the section on old auricula pictures. The Ehret paintings are probably ones at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

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## In the Footsteps of Farrer: Hiking in the Dolomites

MATT MATTUS

The Alps are perhaps the most iconoclastic of all mountain ranges on earth, especially to Alpine plant enthusiasts. Besides the obvious root-of-the-word reason, the Alps themselves are particularly important to Primula enthusiasts, since they delivered early plant hunters the very first populations *P. auricula*.

The ranges of the Southern Limestone Alps, including the Carnic Alps, in north eastern Italy are known collectively as the Dolomites. They extend from the region of Lombardy in the west, to the border of Slovenia in the east. Their distinctive forms are incredibly beautiful with their towering pinnacles and



Even in late June, one can still find a few *Primula minima* in bloom at 7000' near the snow melt.

Photos: M.Mattus

colors that reflect evening sunsets on their nearly white sedimentary deposits. There is no other place on earth that looks like this.

The Dolomites however, are quite unique, both visually and botanically. Even though they are next door neighbors to the even taller Swiss Alps, they are completely different in appearance. Unless you



Trails are lined with alpine primula along the infamous Viel del Pan, Farrer's Bindleweg above the Fassa valley. This trail tests hikers fortitude with cliffs thousands of feet high and the glaciers of Marmolada, one of Italy's tallest mountains.

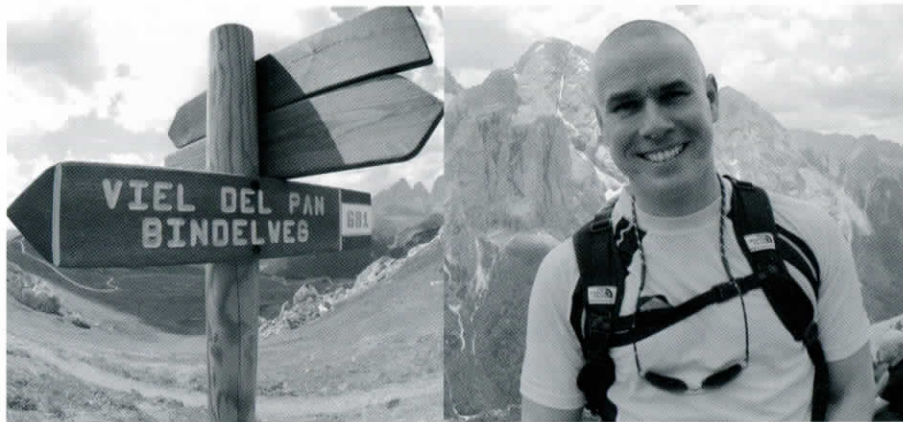
are a professional skier (The World Cup and The Winter Olympics are to be held here this winter), or a plant hunter, you most likely have not heard of the Dolomites, they are off the radar for most travelers when they think of Italy.

Botanically, this is truly Reginald Farrer country, the turn-of-the-century alpine explorer who botanized the area and made it famous in his numerous books and writings. The combination of both alkaline and acidic soils along with extraordinarily steep cliffs of dolomitic limestone provide a special habitat for a long list of well known alpine plants. These are the mountains that gave us the tent-pole species that are the backbone of our passion - *Primula marginata*, *P. auricula* and *P. allionii*.

Geologically, the range is unique. The range was formed from a mixture of ancient sea beds, some with coral colonies and sediment, laid over non-calcareous primary rocks (granite) which have been exposed through erosion over time resulting in a striking alien landscape that combines rounded mountain slopes with rich acidic soil and needle-like limestone steeple formations – if you are an alpine plant looking for an ideal home, this is the place to live. If you are an alpine plant freak, these mountains are pure nirvana.

In June of 2005, I traveled alone from Boston to Milan (via Paris) with the





Trail signs on the Farrer's Bindleweg (left). Myself (the editor) on a break while hiking in the Italian Dolomites.

intent of spending nine days hiking and photographing in the highest elevations of the Dolomites. I rented a car in Milan, where the temperature neared 95 degrees F. and the drove the five hours to Bolzano to the north. My final destination was a small ski village called Selva/Wolkenstien in Val Gardena. This part of Italy is confusingly known as Sud Tirol (South Tyrol), and once was part of Austria until 1919, when it was ceded to Italy following World War I. Most of the names have both Italian and German iterations.

Driving north from Milan, you pass through the lovely lakes region of Lago de Garda, worth another trip on its own. I have to admit, with Venice a couple of hours away in one direction and Florence in another, I thought that I might explore if became culturally hungry, but the hiking was so magnificent in the Dolomites, that I was overwhelmed and I never thought once of leaving. Those cities would have to wait for more focused trips. On the car drive from Milan, one sees the classic Italian landscape of olive orchards in the Italian Lakes region give way, quite suddenly, to a what we imagine a travel poster for Switzerland to look like (enter milk chocolate, cheese and lederhosen, cuckoo clocks and delicious pastry). I'll survive without Venice for a while.

The Dolomites are very accessible from either Germany to the north (Innsbruck is 31 Kilometers to the north, or from Milan or Venice from the South). Diving in Italy was hardly a challenge, but remember I am technically a Boston driver, so this was a breeze. Accommodations are incredibly civilized, with



Photos: M. Mattus

*Primula farinosa*, the Bird's Eye Primula is common in the high alpine meadows. (left). At nearly 10,000 ft., snow still remains on a late June day on the tabletop mountain at Passo Pordoi, in Val Gardena, Italy.

most four star ski lodges open for the "Flora weeks" of June, a slow time in this area since the Italians tend to go to the sea in June, and prefer to go to the mountains in late July and August. Most offer plans where your meals are included in the room cost.

My hiking plans included some of the most well known flora hikes in the Alps, and included both high elevation hikes requiring harnesses and helmets in the high passes of the Passo Pordoi and the Via Ferratas, to more accessible hikes that had me taking ski gondola's to high alpine meadows in the Sassa Lungo. The famous Bindleweg delivered most of my best shots, and was perhaps the most comfortable to hike since although it is at a high elevation, once you reach height, you tend to stay there.

One really never knows what one will find when planning a hike that is new and far away. I depended upon books and tour descriptions that I found online that provided me with locations and I just simply took a chance- a chance that paid off. Before I left, I made a list of plants that I wanted to photograph, and I found all but three. I knew that it was too late for *Primula auricula*, and that was one plant that I could not find. On my first day hiking along Sassa Lungo, I found a single battered *P. farinosa*, then another, but most had petals that we're damaged. Still, I took many photographs of the specimen, since, if you've done anything like this, you know that the odds are that if you wait, you may never see one again. Besides, it was a little late to see them in bloom. About ten minutes later, I passed into a meadow of thousands of *P. farinosa*,



known commonly here to locals as the bird's eye primula, and they were in full summer bloom. The vista beyond was straight from "A Sound of Music" and below my feet was a carpet of pink and in the distance, the Alps rose to nearly 14,000 feet. The hills were indeed, alive!

Some Primula highlights included some late *P. minima* blooming within a slope of *Daphne petrea* which was in full fragrant bloom, and alongside another rarely seen member of Primulaceae, *Soldanella alpina*. I was thrilled to find three species of *Soldanella*, including *S. pusila* and *S. minima*.

Other Primulaceae I found near or close to the snowmelt line, were *Androsace hausermannii*, *A. obtusifolia*, and, more commonly, *A. helvetica*, but they were past peak bloom. The Bindleweg follows a trail across the deep valley below towering Mt. Marmolada where I had hoped to see the area's rarest primula, *P. tyrolensis*. Maybe I'll find one next year.

June is peak bloom for most of the alpine plants in the Dolomites. Alpine species of many *Gentiana*, *Anemone*, *Trollius*, and *Potentilla* are common. Higher pinnacles lead me to cliff dwellers like *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *Eritrichium nanum* and other encrusted saxifrages that I could not identify. The

In Late June, long after snow melt in the Alps, one may still find a few white flowered precious *Soldanella minima* in deep shady crevices above 7000 ft. if you're lucky.



richer meadows had an impressive number of terrestrial orchids most notably *Orchis mascula* in pink and also the rare white form. Other ground orchids included *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and the chocolate scented *Nigritella nigra*.

Most hikers revel over the spectacular and truly breathtaking views from the high elevation walks, but equally memorable, even to those hikers who are not botanists, are the alpine plants that you see everywhere. If you choose to visit this area of the Italian Alps you will find many plants in bloom. These are not difficult hikes as long as one can handle the sense of vertigo and the elevation. It is not uncommon to find the brilliant sky Blue *Gentiana verna* and *G. acaulis*, dotting the green grassy slopes along with light yellow *Pulsatilla apiifolia* and with *Anemone baldensis*. *Trollius europa* is practically a common weed and even though you sort of get used to the common plants on these walks, you are reminded of the surrealness, when you stop for a lunch of cheese and crusty bread and realize that you are actually sitting on top of a seat of *Polygala chamaebuxus*, and *Primula glutinosa*.

The golden cups of *Trollius europa* cover the slopes on some of the higher elevation meadows in the area around Italy's Val Gardena near Selva.



Photos: M. Mattus



## BOOK REVIEW

## Alice Hills Baylor and Primroses for Eastern Gardens

Since the 2005 National American Primrose Show was to be the first National show held in New England in many years, Show Chair Elaine Malloy and her husband Alex wanted to do something special and lasting to mark the occasion. While reading through back issues of *Primroses*, Alex noticed a series of articles by one lady, Alice Hills Baylor, about her gardens and experiences growing *Primulas* in her Vermont garden. Alex decided these articles deserved publication as a collection and set to work.

Alice's family, when told of the project, enthusiastically lent slides, photographs and other biographical information to the Malloys, and the result is a charming little book. There are 67 pages of articles and photographs by and about Alice, a preface by the Malloys, and an introduction by G. Kristian Fenderson, who was lucky enough to have experienced



“the generosity and goodwill of this talented lady.”

Biographical information in the first few articles provides validation of Mrs. Baylor's credentials as a horticulturist and naturalist. The following articles, written by her, prove that she could share information in an enjoyably clear and concise manner, as a friend would, with plenty of practical tips and anecdotes.

The writings include descriptions of Japanese *Primulas*, cleverly taken from a magazine written entirely in Japanese, which Alice regretted being unable to read. Articles contain cultural directions on everything from seed sowing to dividing, with soil, moisture, and light conditions for many species explained. There are

simple notes from her daily walks around the garden, detailed instructions for growing under fluorescent lights, and descriptions of alpine plant hunting expeditions (with real alpins discovered and dug) in the mountains of New England. She admits to having some species ‘disappear’ from her Sky Hook gardens, which only proves her truthfulness in writing.

We can not hope to grow all the exotic *Primulas* we lust after in every location, but Alice has told us how to grow many of the loveliest ones successfully in apparently inhospitable places.

The only difficulty I found with the book was in deciding whether to get another cup of tea and sit back to gobble a few more articles, or to get out to the garden and enthusiastically carry out a bit of the book's advice.

*Alice Hills Baylor and Primroses for New England* is available from the New England Chapter of the American Primrose Society, Elaine Malloy, PO Box 38, South Salem NY 10590 or from your APS Chapter. Price is \$10.

JUDITH SELLERS

## IN ERRATA

Please find below the missing paragraphs from Angela Bradfords article on Breeding *Primula* from the spring Issue of *PRIMULAS*.

She liked some of the pastel-coloured ones so much that she has decided to pursue 2 separate breeding lines: one of the whites she chose in the first place and another of the pastel colours to see if she can fix a strain of these. She decided not to go ahead with the yellow ones as there were already a number of yellow strains. These will be discarded as they appear

The original Paris '90 strain had been “fixed” over a number of years. This means that the desired characteristics had become dominant. However, as with the majority of polyanthus, there were a large number of recessive genes lurking in the background. It only needed an “out-cross” to be made – i.e. a new element to be introduced – for some of these recessive genes to recombine and be presented in the next generation. Take note and beware!

**YEAR 3** (This year, in fact)

The white strain is settling down and is only presenting a few uncharacteristic plants, so Lynne has high hopes of being able to market it (she hasn't thought of a name yet) after another 2 or 3 years when she is sure it's fixed. The pastel strain is still showing wide variations, but is becoming more attractive, so she has decided to continue with it for another year or two to see what happens and also to test customer reaction to it when they visit the nursery.



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## 2005-2006 SEED EXCHANGE

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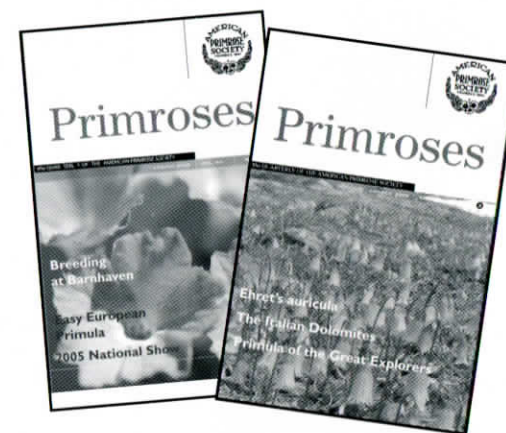
APS Seed Exchange  
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Please clearly mark (that means print in very legible text) donated seed with species or hybrid name, size, color and /or form, and any additional info you think might assist a grower on each lot of collected seed before mailing. Don't forget to identify yourself as the donor with your contact info (preferably email). Additional information will be available shortly on the APS web page seed exchange link. Please keep checking our site for updates to include foreign donated seed intake addresses. Questions, comments, complaints, or helpful suggestions can be forwarded to the seed committee through the Juneau Chapter of the APS, Robert Tonkin, President, at the address noted above or emailed to [primroses@gci.net](mailto:primroses@gci.net). If all goes well we will mail the seed list first to overseas members, followed in about five days to domestic members, and then place on the web site for reference. You can help speed the process along by sending seed early and clearly documenting your donated seed.

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