



The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN - 98

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

NOVEMBER 2008

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Mike Robinson

Chairman's Notes

It seems almost every month that some new threat to the planet's future is emblazoned on the pages of the newspapers, so it is with some pleasure that I write to recount a few small steps that are being taken to prevent the loss of rhododendrons in cultivation - at least until the final cataclysm eliminates everything.

The gardening press seems positively to relish the nastiness of rhododendrons so far as harbouring disease is concerned. The future of *R. ponticum*, or what passes for it in the British Isles, is rightly under careful review, and it certainly should no longer be used as a rootstock, but, naturally, the press does not distinguish between species and hybrids in a diverse genus - of course the general population is considered not to be able to handle any concept of complexity and diversity these days. It is quite true that *phytophthora ramorum* and *phytophthora kernoviae* are serious problems in parts of the country, and the discovery of these on cultivars and species in first Cornish, and now in Scottish, gardens gives real cause for concern, even if the diseases have probably been there for decades. That these pathogens affect not only rhododendrons but magnolias and other genera of highly desirable garden plants is worrying to say the least.

At the same time as bemoaning the presence of problems, journalists seem to hold science and technology in deep suspicion. It is with even more pleasure, therefore, that I am able to remind members that modern technology is providing a way of saving our plants. As reported in the 2008 yearbook, the micro propagation facility at the Duchy College at Rosewarne, set up with EU funding which has now, alas, been used up, has been successful in preserving a number of rhododendron hybrids and species from Trengwainton and Heligan. Members will know that micro propagation has been widely used to produce nursery stock on a vast scale, and like me, may have assumed that the scale and costs of such operations make them irrelevant to gardening on the amateur scale. So far as the Duchy College is concerned, however, and assuming funding does not dry up completely, small numbers of plants are being produced at reasonable cost.

Thanks to one of our committee, John Harsant, micro propagation of three hybrids chosen by Troy Smith, the head gardener at the National Trust garden at Bodnant has been commenced at the College. *Continued on page 2*



An opening flower of the beautiful evergreen *Magnolia ventii* V.S. Kumar, - formerly *Manglietia hebecarpa* C.Y. Lu & Law. June 2008 in Kunming Botanic garden. Photo Mike Robinson

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If successful, and the process does not always work, about 30 plants of each will be produced at the cost of a few pounds each. These will be free of bacterial and fungal pathogens, and will be virus free as well. The hybrids chosen are R. 'Penjerrick' white form – not a Bodnant hybrid, of course, but one of the most beautiful of the early Cornish crosses, and two Bodnant hybrids not to my knowledge, generally released. As is reported in this bulletin, these are R. 'Mikado' (*R. griffithianum* x R. 'Cornish Cross', Aberconway 1926) and R. 'Redwing' ('Shilsonianii' Group x 'Barclayi' Group, Aberconway 1927, FCC 1937), both superb hybrids.

The opportunity to have a rare or unique taxon propagated at the cost of a few pounds per plant should appeal to curators of collections and even to the amateur desirous of preserving something special. Any excess can always be sold through the Group's surplus plant scheme.

I hope we are entering a new and exciting time where unusual plants will be made available to all those who want them!

Another interesting venture is the launch of the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group by a group of Scottish experts. This is designed to keep in cultivation the best forms of species. These were often collected in the first half of the last century by people like Forrest, Wilson and Kingdon Ward who had the time to identify the finest form of a species in flower, and then return to collect seeds from it. Details of the Conservation Group are enclosed with this bulletin, and there is a conference in Helensburgh next spring.

An essential preliminary to conserving a species is, naturally, to identify where it is growing, and the RSCG has undertaken a project to list all the rhododendron species growing in Scotland. An approach to our Group by Mike Buffin – the gardens advisor to a southern England area of the National Trust - gives hope that the branches of the group may be able to assist in doing a similar job in at least some of the gardens in England and Wales.

Ideally the Group needs a co-ordinator to monitor this project. Is there any one out there who would undertake this interesting and challenging task?

Perhaps the commonest thing I as chairman am asked to do, and I am sure I am not alone in this, is to identify rhododendrons – often the old Victorian hybrids growing in one garden or another. The request is usually accompanied by a photograph of the flowers. What a wretchedly difficult task this is! I almost always have to ask for additional information, and thought it might be useful to list the things needed to identify an unknown rhododendron:-

Location of plant (geography exposed, open ground, protected?)

Size of plant

Likely date of planting

Source of plant, if known

Flowering time

Fragrance?

Is the colour of the flowers on a photograph accurate - most photographs are still too red, and those taken in sunlight are generally very misleading?

Leaf details – size, shape

Presence of any indumentum and colour of this if present.

Ideally a sample of a typical leaf - examination under magnification sometimes reveals essential information.

Sample of one corolla (essential for alpine rhododendrons)

Bark – colour, rough or smooth, peeling, etc.

Is the plant a self sown seedling?

And finally, is there a label in the vicinity?

The most difficult cultivars are of course, those with glabrous leaves. Unfortunately this includes most of the 19th century hybrids. However I shall keep trying!

Finally, and most important of all, it is a delight to record the inaugural meeting of the new West Midlands branch of the Group. 25 of us enjoyed an informative and enjoyable day at Hergest Croft on Saturday 4th October. Thanks to Alastair and Jan Stevenson, and to Cheryl Sapcote for all their efforts. We wish them great success!

EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

I apologise for the number of errors that crept into the last Bulletin, largely due to the short period between the return from the Yunnan Tour and the publication date for the printers. I thank those who kindly pointed out some of the glaring inaccuracies!

A few of these errors do need to have the amendments recorded:

Firstly, the reports of the Yunnan Tour included one or two misspelt names and unlikely plants for the eastern Himalayas!!

On page 5, at the Tianchi lake, the white form of *R. niveum*, should of course read *R. nivale*!

Secondly, in the report of the Main Rhododendron Competition the caption under the lovely photograph of the *R. cinnabarinum* ssp *xanthocodon* *purpurellum* group. was incorrect The exhibitor and grower was Barry Starling, not John Bodenham (and also requires correcting in the report for Class 21 of the Competition). I apologise to both members for the error.

We have received a complaint over a commercial use possibly being made of the Membership List of the Group. We draw members attention to the Terms & Conditions of membership of the RHS as outlined in the Members Handbook, that the "RHS will not supply details of members for marketing purposes" and that the Group Membership List carries the heading "This list is for use by members of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group of the RHS only and strictly for affairs relating to the Group"

Perhaps we should add to this: "All members have access to the contents of this list and the Group does not have control over the uses to which this may be put".

We ask members to respect this request, but if this issue does recur in the future, members might, regrettably, have to remove their name from the published list.

Sadly we have to report the recent death of the prominent botanist and arborist **Peter Wharton** of the University of British Columbia Botanic Garden., Canada.

Peter trained in the UK at the University of Wales, Bangor and Merrist Wood Agricultural College, Guildford, Surrey. He emigrated to Canada and worked for the UBC for 30 years and was the Curator of the David C. Liam Asian Garden of the UBC Botanic Garden.

A fuller obituary will appear in the Yearbook.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I need your letters, reports from branches, articles, future events etc, to keep the members up to date!

So, please send me your letters and copy

**for the March 2009 Bulletin
by 14th February 2009.**

Please send to:

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TOURS

Judith Hallett

GROUP SPRING TOUR OF SOUTH WALES 2009

18th to 22nd April 2009

A Group tour to Wales is long overdue, so our Spring Tour 2009 will be to South West Wales. We shall arrive at the Ivy Bush Hotel in Carmarthen on Friday 17 April and enjoy five full days of garden visits before our departure on Thursday 23 April after breakfast.

Ivor Stokes has been working extremely hard to put together the itinerary that appears below; he has arranged for us to visit some spectacular gardens where we are sure to view fine plants of our genera.

I still have to finalise some expenses but I would expect the cost to be between £400 and £500.

Do let me know as soon as possible if you are interested in joining the tour as places will be limited.

Judith Hallett at: Judy.Hallett@googlemail.com or 01981 570401

The Tour Programme

Sat.18 April

Morning – Picton Castle – One of Wales' oldest lived-in castles set amid fine woodland gardens with a walled garden containing a wide range of tender and rare plants. Many interesting 'home-bred' hybrids raised by Leo Ekkes, the former head gardener. (Plant Sales and Restaurant)

Afternoon – Colby Lodge – The National Trust's showcase garden in West Wales, extensive woodland walks and a charming small walled garden, open by courtesy of Mr. and Mrs Scourfield Lewis. (Plant Sales and Restaurant)

Sun 19 April

Morning – Clyne Gardens – Situated on the sweep of Swansea Bay, this 50 acre garden contains the finest collection of rhododendrons in Wales and possibly also the tallest *Magnolia campbellii* 'Alba' in Britain. It holds four NCCPG collections – *Pieris*, *Enkianthus* and two sections of *Rhododendron*.

(Lunch in local hostelry)

Afternoon – Penrice Castle – The garden, a William Eames landscape, orangery and walled garden are currently being restored and new plantings undertaken, glorious views over the Gower coast. Afternoon tea kindly provided by Judith and Thomas Methuen Campbell.

Mon 20 April

Morning – Pant yr Holiad and Old Cilgwyn – Two members' gardens, the first containing a range of hybrids raised by Geoff & Brenda Taylor as well as plenty of species and other plants of interest; the second, developed by Edward Fitzwilliams has a mix of long-established old Hardy Hybrids, species and fine parkland.

Afternoon – Ffynone – Home of the Earl and Countess of Dwyfor, which was designed by John Nash in 1790. The woodland garden, on a slope to the south-west of the house, was created in the late 19th century and contains some fine rhododendrons and other features. Afternoon tea courtesy of the the Earl and Countess.

Tue 21 April

Morning – Stradey Castle – Sir David and Lady Mary Mansel Lewis have been restoring the 'Wilderness' adjacent to the site of the original house and planting prolifically in the woodlands that surround the castle.

Afternoon – Gelli Aur Arboretum – A good collection of Ghent azaleas and Hardy Hybrids planted in the mid 19th century amongst some of the finest coniferous trees in South Wales, afternoon tea at Llyshendy, home of Ivor and Jane Stokes.

Wed 22 April

Morning – Aberglasney – the newly restored garden, run by Graham Rankin ex member of the Wessex group. It featured in the TV series 'A Garden Lost in Time'. Some fine Magnolias, Camellias and Rhododendrons in the woodlands.

Afternoon – National Botanic Garden of Wales - Opened in 2000 this is the first national garden to have been created in 200 years. Set within 570 acres of Regency parkland, it contains a unique double walled garden, Lord Foster's stunningly beautiful Great Glasshouse, a restored Stable Block and Servants Quarters, a Water Discovery Centre and a chain of lakes with naturalistic plantings as well as more formal herbaceous and shrub borders.

(Restaurant and plant sales at both sites)

RHODODENDRONS

Rhododendron yakuinsulare

Shuichi Niihara Kagoshima-shi, Japan

A neglected azalea species from the famous Yakushima Island, Southern Japan.

Introduction

In Yakushima Island, off Kyushu, southern Japan, eight species of the genus *Rhododendron** are known (Hatusima 1991, Yamazaki 1996). Without doubt, the most worldwide famous of them are *R. yakushimanum* and *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae*. Also two evergreen 'Satsuki' azaleas, *R. indicum* and *R. eriocarpum* made an important contribution to the Japanese bonsai world.

Among them, *Rhododendron yakuinsulare* Masamune has been a little known evergreen azalea species, only described in a few botanical works (Yahara *et al.* 1987, Yamazaki 1993,1996). Most Japanese rhododendron enthusiasts have seen no true living material.

In 1930s, the late Dr. Genkei Masamune, a specialist in plants from Yakushima, described this azalea (Masamune 1930). He gave it the Japanese name Yakushima-yamatsutsuji, meaning Yakushima Island's Kaempfer azalea (*R. kaempferi*).

In 2007, I had the opportunity to observe this plant in its native habitat. So I would like briefly to introduce this azalea to western readers.



(1) *Rhododendron yakuinsulare*.

A large shrub near the riverside of the Anbo River. (10 May 2007)

Morphology and Taxonomy

R. yakuinsulare is a shrub with multiple stems up to 4m in height, but is usually 1m to 2m in height (Photo 1). The leaves are chartaceous, 60mm long and 20mm wide, and oblong-lanceolate. In mid-April to mid-June, 2 to 3 flowers are produced from the terminal buds. The 5-lobed, funnel shaped corolla is red or pale red and 45 mm across. The 10 stamens are unequal length. Remarkable variations are seen in corolla size and leaf shape. The corolla size varies 35mm to 71mm across. And the leaves of riverside plants show 'stenophyllism' (Hatusima 1991, Photo 2,). Their acute

lanceolate blades are distinguished from the oblong ones of light woodland plants (Photo 3). So often they look like *R. tashiroi*, which show the similar 'stenophyllism' and occur abundantly in the same place (Photo 4).

Taxonomically this species relates to *R. oldhamii* (Taiwan), *R. amanoi* (southern Ryukyus) and *R. scabrum*. The most closely allied species is *R. scabrum* of Amami and Okinawa Islands of middle Ryukyus. The major differences between them are *R. yakuinsulare* has a smaller corolla and greater density of whitish adpressed hairs on the leaf upper surface (Photo 5). Recently an author treated *R. yakuinsulare* as a variety of *R. scabrum* (Yamazaki 1993, 1996).



(2) *R. yakuinsulare*. A stenophyllous leaf form from the riverside



(3) *R. yakuinsulare*. An oblong leaf form in the woodland. The white plastic scale is 15cm long.



(4) *R. tashiroi*. Commonest azalea species in Yakushima Island. Some plants show 'stenophyllism'

Habitat

I observed two small populations of *R. yakuinsulare* near Anbo, Yaku-cho, eastward of the island. One is around the well-developed evergreen broadleaved tree forest that clothes the ravine of the Anbo River. *R. yakuinsulare* occurs along the riverside or on the steep sunny slope of the ravine at an altitude of 0 to 10 m (Photo 6 & 7). On some plants nearest to the stream, occasional floodwater washes their roots. Possibly not surviving under deep shade, young seedlings are only found on the steep stony parts of the site.



(5) Upper surface of the leaves.

Left; *R. yakuinsulare*.

Right; *R. scabrum* (ex Kunigami-son, Okinawa Island).

The other is on the rocky road-cut side between Anbo and Yakusugi-Island, at an altitude of 550 to 610m. Mixed with abundantly regenerating seedlings of *R. tashiroi*, *R. yakuinsulare* occurs as shrubs of at most 1m in height. In this site, several plants have flowers with 5 to 7 stamens and smaller lanceolate leaves (Photo 8). They are likely to be chance hybrids with *R. indicum*, which have flowers with 5 stamens and have an overlapping flowering season.

Although usually occurring as rheophytes along the streams, sometimes *R. indicum* mixes in low bushes on the wet mountainside. But I cannot fully explain the origin of pollen source, because the mass plantations of *R. indicum* are along the roadside.



(6) Riverside of the Anbo River. *R. yakuinsulare* at the margin of the evergreen broadleaved tree forest.



(7) *R. yakuinsulare*. A plant on the steep rocky slope



(8) A natural hybrid (*R. yakuinsulare* x *R. indicum*).

The 7 stamens and narrow leaves show the intermediate characters of the two species.

Cultivation

Like many other evergreen azaleas, its cultivation is very easy. Summer cuttings root well. Because of its smaller corolla size, horticultural merit of this species seems less than *R. scabrum*. But considering its variation, further careful observation and selection will be needed. It might be useful rare material for subtropical gardens.

**Rhododendron keiskei* (with var. *ozawae*), *R. semibarbatum*, *R. yakuinsulare*, *R. criocarpum*, *R. indicum*, *R. tashiroi*, *R. yakuniontnmuu* and *R. yakushmanum* (with var. *intermedium*).

Photographs provided by the author – dated Spring 2007.

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Preservation of the Aberconway Hybrids at Bodnant Gardens

John Harsant

Although I have visited Bodnant Gardens from time to time over many years it is only during the past year that I have more completely understood the significance of this very important collection; thanks largely to Troy Smith the Head Gardener and his taxonomist Alison Clarke. There is a great need to give publicity to the wealth of this collection but immediately I would like to dwell on the subject of preservation.

The policy of the Gardens is to preserve them as they are, but as we all know gardens grow and change, grow old, as we do, and need constant care and attention to keep them intact. In particular a programme of propagation is needed to replace plants which are lost, and indeed to strengthen the collection. Propagation is underway mainly by rooting cuttings but without micro propagation facilities on the premises, facilities which are needed particularly for older plants and those which for whatever reason are harder to root. Currently Bodnant Garden is free from *Phytophthora ramorum/kernoviae* but an investigation is currently being undertaken.

It was during discussions with Troy Smith that I learnt of the work at the Duchy College and we have a small batch of three plants with the college, to gain experience of working with the college and to formulate a way forward. The cultivars concerned are:- *R. 'Penjerrick'*, *R. 'Redwing'* and *R. 'Mikado'*; 40 plants of each will be prepared and it is expected, as they will not all be needed at Bodnant, that many of those being released will be placed at the disposal of the Group.

I attach pictures of *R. 'Mikado'* and *R. 'Penjerrick'* but do not have one of *R. 'Redwing'* at the moment. I am told that it is a fine red hybrid similar in appearance to *R. 'Shilsonii'* but with a larger truss, it also has stunning pale red peeling bark making it an attractive plant for all year interest (although you cannot see it from the photo '*Mikado*' also has very beautiful bark).

There are several different colour variants of Penjerrick and they are all at Bodnant, but the one that we decided to use for the purpose of micropropagation is the plain white (and probably original) variety, as featured in the photo.

I am most obliged for the help so readily given by Ros Smith at the Duchy College and repeat a note she sent to me about the college.

"The micropropagation unit at Duchy College, Rosewarne, Camborne have been attempting to conserve through micropropagation the rare and historic rhododendron species and hybrids found in the old gardens of Cornwall. The reason is twofold; many are original introductions, some dating back to the 1850's, and may be coming to the end of their life span. The other more recent reason is the appearance of *Phytophthora ramorum/kernovii* (Sudden Oak Death) in many of these gardens which ultimately requires the destruction of infected plants.



R. 'Penjerrick'



R. 'Mikado'

The micropropagation process involves growing small sterilized pieces of plant material in a nutrient jelly under laboratory conditions to ensure that no contamination occurs. Young vegetative shoots have proved difficult to decontaminate successfully, so we have been regenerating shoots from the flower stalk (pedicel) which is easier to decontaminate. The overall aim is to produce up to 200 clones of the mother plant. The majority of these propagules are to be returned to their original owners, but where gardens have no commercial outlet there will be some available for sale.

Earlier EU funding which enabled us to process plants on request has now ended and since September last year this work has been funded by local gardens, organisations and individuals. We are meeting shortly to work out a business plan for the future of the programme"

Contact details are Mrs. Ros Smith, Duchy College, Rosewarne, Camborne, Cornwall TR14 0AB. ros.smith@duchy.ac.uk

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

As one who thoroughly enjoyed my pre-conference tour of gardens in Scotland this spring, may I make the following comments, generally.

My most pleasant surprise was being the only Englishman present in our coach, with mostly Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders – and only four Scots!

This made the tour from my point of view. The organisers are to be congratulated, as gardens and accommodation were first rate.



Kalmiopsis leachiana

It never ceases to amaze me how gardening produces such a range of intelligent, informative and occasionally eccentric owners, whose ability to share their enthusiasm is second to none. Our overseas visitors were generally impressed by both the clarity of the information and its delivery around the gardens, but interspersed with unique bon-mots (and even poetry recitations!). Scotland certainly has plenty to be proud of in many respects, and to this Englishman, meeting the head of the Trotter Clan on home turf was an unexpected pleasure.

During one visit we saw a wonderful plant of *Kalmiopsis leachiana*, a small shrubby member of Ericaceae. I last saw this in a pot at Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens whilst still a student, and note that it is still only offered by one or two suppliers in the Plant Finder, and in two forms *K. leachiana* 'Glendoick' and *K. leachiana* 'Shooting Star'. I enclose an original picture from 1963.

Hilary Newman, Tonbridge, Kent.

~~~~~  
*The letters about the damage done by squirrels to rhododendrons and Magnolias has raised considerable interest. From Sacramento, California comes this letter with some thoughts and suggestions!* (Ed)

Dear Editor,

My beloved husband and I read with absolute horror the letters of Mr Hammond and Mrs Hayward. We think we have been spared so far because there has not yet been a famine. However, much of the shifts in wildlife behaviour and predation, we note, are likely due to the global climate change and human overdevelopment and overpopulation.

My husband has kept weather records since he was 10 or so – a good 43 years now. The changes we have noted began in 1998, and have intensified of late. This corresponds with the time given by Mrs Hayward for her troubles.

Our Sacramento residence is surrounded by housing, which limits predatory activity. We are blessed with a neighbour who is a very good shot, however. So far our Placerville property has enough openness for predators.

At this location, deer fencing is a must. We use what we call T-posts (a metal rod with a barb) that comes in various heights, plus a special deer and rabbit fence: rolls of wire with a smaller mesh at the bottom 1 foot, than the remaining 7 feet. We have to make our fence 10ft and secure it to the ground, as the deer both burrow under and use the upper hillside to leap over. I do not know what types of fencing are used, or available, in Mr Hammond's area, but I find the wire and T-post option least obtrusive, enabling a wide vista beyond the garden proper.

Jasmin Irnka

*"Since they have fattened, why shouldn't we?  
Rather than have fit, - fete!"*

Squirrel

For a simple affair:

Squirrels: skinned, cleaned and disjointed.

Soaked in cold salt water 20 minutes and dried.

Wheat flour

Egg: beaten and whisked

Course ground maize as for polenta,

Salt & pepper to taste optional.

Bread squirrel: dip squirrel meat in each, wheat, thin egg, finally maize, covering completely.

Fry in hot oil until done.

Variation: fry with onions.

For fancy:

Squirrels in Cider-Gourmet Magazine October 1954.

Skin, clean and disjoint 3 plump squirrels.

Soak the pieces in cold salt water – 20 minutes

Wipe dry and dust with flour, seasoned with salt & pepper.

In a heavy skillet, sauté ¼ cup diced fat ham until browned, Add the squirrel and brown the pieces well on all sides in the ham fat.

Add enough hard cider barely to cover the squirrel, cover the skillet, and simmer until most of the liquid has evaporated and the meat is tender.

Add 2 tablespoons of butter, increase the heat, and quickly brown the pieces of meat again.

Remove the squirrel to a warm serving platter.

To the juices still in the skillet add 1 cup hot cream & stir in the brown bits from the bottom and sides of the pan.

Stir in, bit by bit ½ tablespoon of flour mixed to a paste with 1 tablespoon of butter. Correct the seasoning with salt and pepper, and strain the juices into a gravy boat.

Serve the sauce separately

[This might also work with beer]

Jasmin Irnka

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## BRANCH REPORTS

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**N.W. England & N. Wales Branch**

Robert Smith

Here in the North West it has been a particularly awful summer with a great deal of rain and low light levels. Possibly as a consequence of both these aspects, it appears to have given rise to a much higher than usual incidence of late 'flushes' on some Rhododendrons. I have two example of *R. 'Burletta'*, both of which covered with flowers in the middle of August and even *R. 'Cunningham's White'* put on quite a show. I am somewhat apprehensive as to the effect this out-of-season flowering will have on next year's

performance but I suppose time will tell. It would however be most interesting to hear from other members if they have had similar experiences in other parts of the country. Certainly, the new growth and bud-set has generally been very good indeed, so it is not all bad news.

### **South West Branch - 2008 Spring Visits** Colin Brown

Our programme of spring visits did not get off to an auspicious start! We were scheduled to visit two Cornish camellia and magnolia gardens early in April – Trewithen which most people know and revere and Botallick where our members Pat and Peter Bucknell have been planting an amazing collection of both genera for the past fifteen years. With only a few days to go, Devon and Cornwall were struck by a series of hard frosts and ferocious hail-storms which destroyed the flowers and stripped the leaves from the young shoots. There was nothing for it but to cancel our visits. At least we were able to present the Bucknells with a nice plant of *Magnolia denudata* 'Forrest's Pink' in grateful recognition of all their weeks of hard work getting ready for our visit.

As a footnote, it is worth recording that many Magnolias in the South West are still struggling to recover fully from the frost damage. In my own garden there has been a lot of die-back of the newer, softer wood, with *M.* 'Atlas' and *M.* 'Sayonara' being particularly badly affected.

On 7th May the elements relented and we arrived at the Abbotsbury Sub-tropical Gardens in sub-tropical weather. This marvellous garden is situated close to the Dorset coast at the western end of Chesil Beach. Established nearly 250 years ago by the then Countess of Ilchester, the gardens served her nearby castle. The castle itself was demolished years ago but the gardens survived and, following the great gales of 1990, have been the subject of extensive restoration and improvement. They feature fine plantings of rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias to which has been added an amazing collection of sub-tropicals to rival the better known Tresco Abbey.

We were taken on our tour by the Curator and Head Gardener, Steve Griffith, who fielded countless questions for the remainder of the morning with great patience and authority. It was very thought-provoking to hear him suggest that some of the garden's rhododendrons were beginning to exhibit stress as a result of the gradual change of the local climate to a more Mediterranean pattern with hotter, drier summers and wetter winters.

There is insufficient space here to mention individual plants but my most vivid memories are of the newly planted avenue of *Magnolia campbellii* 'Wisley' under-planted with *Magnolia soulangeana* 'Brozzonii' and *Magnolia wilsonii* and of eating our lunch in the lovely new colonial style restaurant surrounded by a flourishing jungle of palms, bananas and other tropical flora and serenaded by Australian kookaburras.

In the afternoon we drove the short distance to Minterne House, the home of group member Lord Digby. The gardens are laid out in a horseshoe below the house and feature a chain of small lakes, waterfalls and streams and contain an extensive collection of rhododendrons, magnolias, flowering cherries and camellias. On the day of

our visit the Candelabra primulas which grew rampantly along the streams and ponds were a notable feature. Lord Digby conducted us himself and regaled us with a wealth of wise horticultural advice, fascinating historical facts and anecdotes. We enjoyed his commentary as much as we did the catholic collection of plants he was showing us around.

The two gardens we visited on Sunday, 11th May were both within a few miles of Launceston in Cornwall.

John and Gilly Mann started planting their one acre garden 45 years ago, on a high, rather exposed hill-top site overlooking the town itself. Both are inveterate plants-people and show no signs of resting on their laurels now! When I first visited them earlier in the year the whole garden seemed to be carpeted with an amazing collection of hellebores. By May these had given way to herbaceous, alpine and woodland plants growing in the shelter provided by carefully selected trees and shrubs including rhododendrons and camellias. It was no surprise, therefore, to see the best example of *R.* 'Lady Chamberlain' - probably the F.C.C. form - that I have seen anywhere. It was in full flower and showed no sign whatsoever of the powdery mildew which seems to make this hybrid so difficult elsewhere.

In the afternoon we drove three miles to Penheale Manor where we were welcomed by Mrs. Fiona Colville and her Head Gardener Richard Oldaker. We gathered in the courtyard of this magnificent late 16th century house admiring the meticulously planted and gardened formal beds and walls. Then out past more fine herbaceous borders and formal pools to the Woodland Garden and its collections of rhododendrons. *R.* 'Penheale Blue', one of the best blue hybrids for garden planting, was over but there was plenty more to see. Once again we saw superb examples of *R.* 'Lady Chamberlain' - obviously the soils and climate of the Launceston area suit this sometimes difficult to grow grex. Also particularly fine were many yellow hybrids – I have never seen *R.* 'Crest' and *R.* 'Hotei' better grown or more resplendent.

Tea in the ancient courtyard was the perfect end to a perfect Spring day.

### **West Midlands Branch**

Alastair Stevenson

The inaugural meeting of the West Midlands Branch was held on a cold and damp 4<sup>th</sup> October day at Hergest Croft in Herefordshire, the garden of Lawrence and Elizabeth Banks which has a fine Rhododendron collection and the national collections of Acer and Sorbus. Some 24 members gathered from as far afield as Aberystwyth, Bournemouth and Devon for a fascinating day, led by Head Gardener Steven Lloyd. Steven is a highly experienced and successful propagator of plants from seed, particularly *acer*, *sorbus* and *rhododendron* and has been at Hergest Croft for 28 years. He led the group through the propagation process showing many successful seedlings and drawing on the experience of members, many of whom are successful propagators themselves.

In the afternoon Steven and the Banks led the group on a tour of the garden, seeing many maturing examples of their propagation successes. The combined knowledge of the three



was encyclopaedic and there were some wonderful new trees to see as well as the established champion trees planted over 100 years earlier by Lawrence Banks' grandfather

The turnout was a very pleasant surprise, considering the distance many had to travel and augurs well for the establishment of the branch. Further events are in the pipeline and anyone interested in receiving notification of events should contact Alastair Stevenson, preferably by e-mail at [alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk](mailto:alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk) or by post to Appledore, Upton Bishop, Ross-on-Wye HR9 7UL.

#### **Wessex Branch**

*John David*

The Wessex Annual Show was again held 'early' and this was reflected in the classes that had most exhibits and the ones that had only a few or none. The weather in the Spring had, as always, presented a challenge to exhibitors being generally cool and wet, with the remarkable fall of snow on 6th April, only three weeks before. The number of exhibitors was, indeed, up on last previous years, despite the absence of *Magnolia* enthusiast, Rod Wild, and azalea specialist Jim Inskip, and was evidenced by the lack of entries in the *Magnolia* class and the deciduous azalea classes, although it was probably a little early for the latter. By contrast there were plenty of exhibits in the rhododendron species classes and the lepidote hybrid class which had been favoured by the earlier date and, possibly by the cool spring. The triumph of any Show is to be able to exhibit a perfect truss of a *R. fortunei* or its hybrids, such as *R. 'Loderi'*, whose flowers are so prone to the slightest damage from the weather, or even their own stamens which leave tiny blemishes.

Particularly good were the camellias, with 31 exhibits across all three classes and of an exceptionally high standard, like *fortuneis*, they suffer all too readily from the vagaries of the climate.

This year we managed to secure the expertise of Wisley's Colin Crosbie to judge the Show, a task which he carried out as if to the manor born. When it came to totalling up the points, for the first time I think, there were two exhibitors with an equal number. Mrs George and Mrs Hooton therefore shared the honours for the Katherine Beadle Shield. The Lady Adam Gordon Plate was awarded to the winner of Class 6 (three different lepidote trusses) went to Brian Long for his fine trusses of *R. 'Cosmopolitan'*, *R. 'Teddy Bear'* and *R. 'Taurus'*. The Best in Show was, undoubtedly, a truss of *R. 'Taurus'* shown by Margaret Hall. Its glowing scarlet lit up the hall in fleeting spells of sunshine and stood out in the dull light of an overcast afternoon.

Our thanks, as always, to Mr & Mrs Gunn for their generosity in hosting the show in such convenient and attractive surroundings as well as providing an excellent tea to reward the exhibitors for their labours. We thank, also, Colin Crosbie for giving up a Sunday afternoon to judge the show and for his thoughtful comments on the exhibits. I end, as I customarily do, by urging everyone who grows any of the plants covered by our Group, or any flowering shrub covered by Class 10, to put something in the Show next year. Every exhibitor this year was placed and seven won firsts.

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## **MEMBERSHIP**

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Rupert Eley

We are very pleased to welcome the new members listed below, and hope they will enjoy the many benefits of membership.

## NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

The 2009 Annual General Meeting will be held on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009 at Kew Gardens, London, at 2.00p.m. It is hoped to arrange a tour of the gardens before lunch.

### Committee Members.

Mr. Eric Annal and Mr. Andy Simons will have served their present three-year term on the Committee in 2009. Both are willing to be re-elected

**A nomination form is enclosed** Please come forward yourself or nominate someone, making sure he/she agrees; a proposer, a seconder and a brief horticultural history of the nominee are all that are required. Please telephone the Chairman on 01794 699 8408 or the Hon. Secretary on 01503 220215 if you require any further details.

## THE GROUP WEB-SITE

([www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org))

Graham Mills

The Group's web site continues to grow with the addition of more high definition photographs of plants in our three genera. Since the last bulletin we have added a large number of high resolution images. Indeed there is a high resolution image for practically all of the camellias.

### Missing photographs

There are still a number of species and hybrids for which we have no good photographs. If you can supply any of the missing photographs for any of the genera then please send them to us. In particular if any members have pictures of the following Camellias:

'Crimson King'; 'Fire Falls'; 'Mathotiana Rosea' and 'Wilamina'. They would be gratefully received by Stephen Lysus - at [emailslus@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:emailslus@yahoo.co.uk).

### Member's Photographs

There have been an encouraging number of excellent photographs already submitted. Members are encouraged to view these and hopefully feel inspired to submit some of their own. At the end of the calendar year, the photos submitted in that year will be judged and the best Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia photo will be chosen. These 3 photos will then be displayed on our Home page for the duration of the following year and as an additional incentive, each member who submitted these photos will be rewarded with a **£25 prize**. Please send your digital photos (as jpg files) to Stephen Lysus at the address above.

Further details of the competition and how to send photographs are given on the web site.

### Membership renewals

It will soon be time to renew your membership. We have for some time been accepting payments for publication purchases and taking applications from new members on the web. This has worked very well so from this autumn you will be able to renew your membership on line. So save yourself a trip to the post box and just connect to our web site and access 'Renewals' under 'Group Information'

### ..... and finally

We achieved a peak of visits during the summer, of 5000 individuals per month visiting the site; if you have not done so then please join them.

If there are additional features that you would like to see added to the site then please contact [webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org)

The following publications are available to Group Members and are sold in support of the Group:

**SEEDS OF ADVENTURE – Peter Cox & Peter Hutchison** Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£27**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**PLANTSMAN'S PARADISE Travels in China –**

**Roy Lancaster** Full Price: **£39.95** Member's Price: **£29**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**Frank Kingdon Ward's RIDDLE of the TSANGPO**

**GORGES** (Second Edition) – **Kenneth Cox**

Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£26**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**CAMELLIAS: The Gardener's Encyclopedia –**

**Jennifer Trehane 2007** 428pp, illust.

Full price: **£35** Member's Price: **£23.50**

Postage: UK **£5.50**, Europe **£10**, Rest of World **£19**

**RHODODENDRONS OF SABAH – George**

**Argent, Anthony Lamb and Anthea Phillipps 2007**

New edition. Full Price in UK: **£55** Member's Price: **£30**

Postage: UK **£5**, Europe **£8**, Rest of World **£15.50** (Air)

**RSF: RHODODENDRON SPECIES 2007 and 2008**

Please enquire.

**RHODODENDRONS OF SUBGENUS VIREYA –**

**George Argent 2006**

Full Price: **£55** Member's Price: **£39**

Postage: UK **£5**, Europe **£8**, Rest of World **£15** (Air)

**International RHODODENDRON REGISTER and**

**CHECKLIST 2004** Full Price: **£90** Member's Price: **£75**

Postage: please enquire.

**THE RHODODENDRON HANDBOOK 1998**

352pp, illust. **NOW £19** post free. Airmail: **+£5**

**YEARBOOK Back Numbers**: please enquire.

Please make cheques (Sterling) payable to: *The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group*. Payment may also be made by *Mastercard* or *Visa* (please include expiry date & security number) or via *PayPal* to [rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net](mailto:rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net)

Contact: Pam Hayward, Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, YELVERTON PL20 6LJ, UK. Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1822 852122

Email: [RCMGPublications@woodtown.net](mailto:RCMGPublications@woodtown.net)

10/08

## Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

### *Inaugural Spring Conference*

*Garelochhead, Helensburgh, Argyll  
Saturday, 4th April, 2009*

**A One-day Programme Featuring Specialist  
Speakers on Conservation Issues  
and Enthralling Garden Visits**

If you have an interest in Rhododendron conservation, and view with increasing concern the on-going losses of Species plants of known provenance that had direct links with the collections in the wild made by the Great Plant Hunters over the century leading up to the start of WWII; or the losses of hybrid material derived from the early-crosses of the Pioneer Hybridisers of yesteryear, you will not want to miss this Conference with its keynote Specialist Speakers on conservation topics in the morning session and the afternoon's conducted tours to a Species collector's garden dating from the 1920's, and a magical plantsman's garden on Argyll's Rosneath Peninsula.

**For Conference information and Registration details contact :**

John M. Hammond, Hon. Secretary R.S.C.G.,  
The Three Chimneys, Cockey Moor Road, Starling, Bury,  
Lancashire BL8 2HB e.mail : [hammondsrhodies@supanet.com](mailto:hammondsrhodies@supanet.com)

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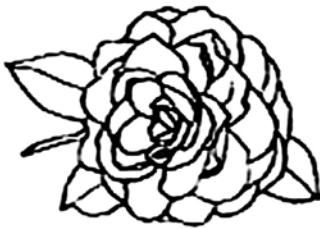
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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### 2008

| Date            | Organiser        | Location                          | Event                                                                                                                                                           | Contact                      |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>October</b>  |                  |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                 |                              |
| 25th            | Wessex Branch    | Lecture room<br>Wisley gdns.7.30. | Talk by Franzistz Zänglein.<br>Head gardener of the Hillier Arboretum (to visit spring 2009)                                                                    | Miranda Gunn 01428 658345    |
| <b>November</b> |                  |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                 |                              |
| 11th            | Lakeland Society | Holehird                          | Talk by Troy Smith,<br>Head Gardener, Bodnant                                                                                                                   | Robert Smith 015394 43041    |
| 15th            | SE Branch        | Ardingly College                  | 'Finding Mr Wilson'<br>A talk by Mark Flanagan & Tony Kirkham.<br>The plant collecting & garden introductions of E.H.Wilson.                                    | Barry Haseltine 01342 713132 |
| 22nd            | NW & N.Wales     | Ness Gardens                      | "The renovation of Arley Hall Gardens<br>& the Development of The Grove,<br>by the Head Gardener Tom Acton.                                                     | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| 29th            | SW Branch        | RHS Rosemoor                      | Full day Autumn meeting from 10.00am<br>Plant Sale, Competition, Talks by Thomas<br>Clarke, Glendurgan Gdns and Mike Robinson<br>on the Group 2008 Yunnan Tour. | Colin Brown 01647 277268     |
| <b>December</b> |                  |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                 |                              |
| 9th             | Lakeland Society | Holehird                          | Talk by Peter Bland 'Pig in a Poke'                                                                                                                             | Robert Smith 015394 43041    |

### 2009

|                 |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>January</b>  |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
| 10th            | NW & N. Wales    | Ness Gardens                                 | The RHS Award of Garden Merit –<br>"The operation & relevance of the scheme to<br>gardeners and nurserymen" by Chris Sanders. | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| 20th            | Lakeland Society | Holehird                                     | Annual Dinner<br>at the Windermere Hydro Hotel                                                                                | Robert Smith 015394 43041    |
| <b>February</b> |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
| 10th            | Lakeland Society | Holehird                                     | Talk by Shelagh Newman<br>on her trip to Yunnan & Sichuan                                                                     | Robert Smith 015394 43041    |
| 14th            | NW & N.Wales     | Ness Gardens                                 | "Camellias from seed and<br>the Sorcerer's Apprentice"                                                                        | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| <b>March</b>    |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
| 10th            | Lakeland Society | Holehird                                     | Talk "Turning over a new leaf –<br>a microscopic marvel"                                                                      | Robert Smith 015394 43041    |
| <b>April</b>    |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
| 17th–23rd       | <b>The Group</b> | <b>Group Spring Tour of South West Wales</b> |                                                                                                                               | Judith Hallett 01981 570401  |
| 18/19th         | SE Branch        | Borde Hill                                   | Branch Rhododendron & Magnolia Show<br>in conjunction with the ICS Camellia Show.                                             | Barry Haseltine 01342 713132 |
| 25th/26th       | SW Branch        | Rosemoor                                     | <b>RHS Main Rhododendron Competition</b><br>& SW Branch Camellia and Magnolia Show.                                           | Colin Brown 01647 277268     |
| <b>May</b>      |                  |                                              |                                                                                                                               |                              |
| 2/3rd           | NW & N.Wales     | Ness Gardens                                 | Branch Show                                                                                                                   | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| 8-10th          | NW & N.Wales     | The Lake District                            | Branch Spring Tour                                                                                                            | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| 16th            | NW & N.Wales     |                                              | Visits to Members' Gardens.                                                                                                   | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193     |
| 16th            | Wessex Branch    | Hillier Gardens                              | Spring Garden Visit                                                                                                           | Miranda Gunn 01428 644422    |
| 31st            | Wessex Branch    | Ramster                                      | Annual Show                                                                                                                   | Miranda Gunn 01428 644422    |