



The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN – 79

APRIL 2002

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Maurice Foster

Ponticum pollution in the media

In the last issue of the Bulletin the editor commented briefly on a letter from Martin Gates of the New Forest branch on this subject. It seems to me to warrant further emphasis.

There has been widespread coverage over the last year of the very real problem of *Rhododendron ponticum* in certain areas, but particularly on the island of Colonsay, to which a grant of £120,000 has been awarded for its control. This has led to general press comment on the 'problem of rhododendrons', with ponticum not specified as the culprit. Even the normally well researched 'Gardening Which' under the heading 'Rhododendron threat', reported that 'rhododendrons are threatening to engulf the small Hebridean island of Colonsay', picking up the story from 'The Independent'. All rhododendrons are being tarred with the ponticum brush and this loose reporting is no longer simply irritating. There is now no doubt that public attitudes to the genus as a whole are being adversely influenced and that rhododendrons in general are being given a bad name. Rhododendrons were actually compared to Japanese Knotweed as an environmental threat, presumably in the interests of entertainment rather than information. Perhaps we could come to some arrangement with the press and they could reveal the secret: of the 500 or so species in cultivation in this country, I would give anything to be invaded by *Rhododendron sinogrande* and one day to find that *Rhododendron cephalanthum* had become a creeping menace.

There is more – the Forestry Commission has published a leaflet on wildlife habitat restoration in the New Forest in which 'thickets of rhododendron scrub' have been cleared and 'In time the toxins in the soil under the shrub will leach away and other plant life return'. The secretary of the Rhododendron and Camellia Committee wrote to the Forestry Commission in December enquiring as to the evidence for such toxins and the effect that they may have on indigenous vegetation. He also expressed concern that rhododendrons as a whole are being demonised and the public is misinformed if it not made clear that *Rhododendron ponticum* is the problem and not...

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Camellia 'Gritsal'

Jennifer Trehane

See 'Scented Camellias' by Jennifer Trehane on page 6

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.... and not 'rhododendrons'. At the time of writing (end of February) he had not received a reply.

On top of this, Sir David Attenborough's comments on TV when he evidently referred to rhododendrons poisoning the soil, made matters much worse because of the size of his audience. It would no doubt inspire well meaning but uninformed 'environmentalists' to vilify all rhododendrons and discourage new plantings, as Eileen Wheeler's letter on page 9 graphically illustrates.

We should lose no opportunity to set the record straight whenever we can and attempt to counter this form of media pollution. Given our present endeavours to help rhododendrons to regain their former level of popularity, the misinformation is adding insult to injury.

Member for a Member

Your help is sought. Inserted in this issue of the Bulletin you will find a brochure describing what the Group sets out to do and the benefits it offers, together with a membership application form. This has been a joint production between the Group and the marketing department of the RHS and it will feature in a spring campaign to gain new members for the Group. It seeks to show that we offer excellent value. It also exemplifies through Group activities the kind of additional benefits available to those joining the RHS.

We have not been losing members, but we have not been gaining them either. Over a comparable period the RHS itself, which represents the pool of potential Group members in the UK, has grown by a quantum amount.

Perhaps there is an information gap that needs to be filled to achieve a more favourable growth comparison.

Ask your friends

With additional membership the Group could do a great deal more to conserve, study and promote our magnificent group of plants and this brochure represents an excellent opportunity for us.

If each existing member recruited one new member, our membership would double overnight. Pie in the sky perhaps – but if only one in ten succeeded we would grow immediately by 10%, no mean achievement and an impetus from which further growth could be expected. So please help – by taking the leaflet and persuading one or more of your plantspeople friends to join us. It's not a lot to ask and you could make a real difference.

EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

Thank you for all your kind comments on the new style of Bulletin. I shall try to continue to improve the appearance and content.

I have been delighted by the response arriving in ideas, articles and letters, which you will be seeing and reading in due course. Do keep them coming!

It was rightly commented that there was not a single item on Camellias in the last issue. This issue makes up for that with two articles on Camellias and also one on Magnolias. Before anyone puts pen to paper, I do anticipate that **there will be articles on Rhododendrons in the October Bulletin!**

Erratum

I must apologise for the titling of the picture of that amazing Rhododendron on the front page of the December issue – this, of course, should read:

Rhododendron protistum var. *giganteum*.

Invitations are regularly received from gardens and Garden Tour Companies, for members to visit or use their services. This last few months we have heard from:

Boxwood Tours: Specialist garden tours 01341 241712.

Portmeirion have produced a 40 min. Video of the village and gardens entitled 'The Essence of Portmeirion' (£12.00 plus £1.50 p.&p.). This has been produced under the guidance of Philip Brown, head gardener for many years who is retiring. The video was filmed over the course of two Autumn Saturdays, and there are added photographs taken over the last twenty years. "As Philip is retiring we wanted to put some of the plants on record. Of course we would love to show all 7000 species but I fear this will be our first and last effort"

Orders: Video Order B.D., PO Box 8, Portmadoc, LL49 9BX with cheque made out to 'Philip Brown'.

Brooklands Nurseries are offering members of the group a 15% discount on orders exceeding £100.

They are at Shute, Nr. Axminster, Devon, EX13 7QF.
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Obituary

I was saddened to receive a report with the Scottish Rhododendron Society 2001 Yearbook recording the death of Mervyn Kessel. I reproduce a slightly abbreviated version of the obituary by Hubert Andrew:

Mervyn Kessel

The sudden death of Mervyn Kessel on Friday 7th December 2001 has come as a bolt out of the blue to all those of us whose path he crossed. He not only held down a whole time job as a horticulturist with the Argyll County Council but also built up a business as a nurseryman with a national reputation in the field of primulas. In between times he wrote the book *Rhododendrons & Azaleas* and also reviewed many publications in the field of horticulture. As a Photographer his flower photographs were the envy of us all. He was on the management committee of Arduane Garden from the time the Wright Brothers gifted it to the National Trust for Scotland. He was involved with the Scottish Rhododendron Society since its inception and as both Vice President and President he guided the Society to the position it now holds in the field of horticulture. He is irreplaceable.

'PLANT HUNTER FAIRS' - 2002. These specialise in rare and unusual plants, and are being held in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire. Members are being offered 50p off the entrance fee. Details: Acorn Events 01246 569698.

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SHOWS SURVEY

Brian Wright

Notes from the results of the survey, carried out by Brian Wright.

The survey, instituted last summer after critically declining entrant numbers at the Vincent Square Competition, has had a very good response. 105 questionnaires (19% of UK members) were returned and gave clear indicators to the Group (and to the RHS Rhododendron and Camellia Committee) of members' views.

The main **disincentives** to showing from those who are interested in doing so, were found to be:

- a) The difficulty and cost involved in travelling to London (77%) and also,
- b) Lack of advice on how to stage entries and what judges are looking for,
- c) Lack of information regarding entry, and,
- d) Preference to enter a branch show where exists.

The **conclusions** drawn from the survey indicate:

- 1) The core interest is sufficient (59%) to run successful events,
- 2) Over 64% showed a preference for competitions to be held outside London,
- 3) There is some support for regional shows, possibly at several spring events at RHS Gardens across the country,
- 4) Various Group branches hold annual shows which currently attract some two or three times the number of entrants for the Westminster events. RHS support for these shows could be in expertise, publicity and prizes.
- 5) There is a need for a less complicated show schedule, possibly with classes for novices.
- 6) There should be better pre- and post event publicity.

The **recommended action** is for an early meeting between the Chairmen of the RHS Rhododendron & Camellia Committee, the RCM Group Committee and the Shows Dept. And for them to consider the feasibility of continuing with London as a venue or whether it is time to rethink and regionally locate competitions in the interests of the of would-be participants and the wider public at large.

SEED DISTRIBUTION

Tony Weston

The following advice is from Alan Clark. It is repeated here, to try to encourage more members to take the plunge and try growing rhododendrons from seed.

Growing Rhododendrons from Seed

The methods outlined below have given outstanding results over the last 10 years

Compost. Use a good quality medium grade moss peat. Pass through a 1cm riddle to remove coarse pieces.

Containers. Shallow trays approx. 4cms deep seem to give the best results. Margarine tubs are particularly useful. Pierce a few drainage holes in the bottom. If conventional shaped pots are used, care must be taken to ensure that the top 1cm. of compost does not dry out.

Method. Fill containers with compost to within approx. 1cm. from the top. Gently firm. Stand containers in water mixed with half-strength Phostrogen and leave until completely wet. Remove and allow excess water to drain away. Use a small piece of wood to firm compost and produce a level surface. Sow seed very thinly on the surface of the compost. Do not cover the seeds. Using a small hand-held sprayer, gently spray to settle the seeds into the compost. Cover containers with glass or clear polythene to maintain humidity; this should be removed a few days after germination, otherwise *botritis* might set in.

Timing. If artificial lighting is not available sow seeds around mid March after which it is probably advisable to keep the seed in the deep-freeze until the following year. Place containers in a well lit situation protected from direct sun. A north facing windowsill is ideal. Temperatures over 65F will cause poor germination. Seed can be sown in Jan/Feb under lights. Approx. 140 watts per sq.m. provided by cool white domestic tubes has produced as good results as the more expensive horticultural types.

Pricking Out. This should be done as soon as the seedlings have produced their second pair of true leaves. The time taken to reach this stage can be quite variable, but most take between 3 to 4 months. With March sowings it is probably best to postpone pricking out until the following spring. Use standard seed trays filled with unsieved medium grade peat, incorporating Suscon @ 1 gram per litre or other Vine Weevil control if you have experienced problems with this pest. After transplanting to 4cms. apart, soak trays in water containing full strength Phostrogen or Miracle-Gro. If your water is 'hard' use the Miracle-Gro designed for Rhododendrons (Miracid).

Watering. Whilst the seedlings are establishing, it is best to water by soaking from below, especially during the growing season - April to September - but keep just moist during the winter months. A few days before pricking out, cease watering to allow the compost to become just moist and crumbling, thus facilitating separation of the young plants, thereby avoiding fatal root damage.

The Next Stage. Around 12 to 14 months after pricking out, transplant the seedlings into 9cm pots or better still about 20cms apart in a peat bed approx. 15cms deep. The latter method enables plants to grow on undisturbed for 2 to 3 years without further work until planted in their permanent positions. If necessary, incorporate Suscon as directed above and use liquid feed (e.g. Phostrogen) at half strength every other watering. If bushy plants are required remove growth buds at the end of each growing season for the first 3 years. If pots are used, pot on into a larger size each spring. Pots should be stood on a porous

surface to allow free drainage and whichever method is used it is essential to protect the plants from hot sun or drying wind.

And finally, **Never Allow Young Rhododendrons To Dry Out.**

(From my experience in the south of England, sowing rhododendron seed up to the end of April still produces good success. There is still time! Ed.)

Seeds still available from C.A. Weston, White Hills, Newton Stewart Scotland, DG8 6SL – **BUT do get your 'last-orders' in very promptly.**

TOURS

Valerie Archibold

The Spring Tour to Germany is now full, and some 20 members are looking forward to an interesting trip.

Autumn Tour to Cornwall

– 17th to 20th October 2002.

This joint weekend with the International Camellia Society is just being finalised. The Carlyon Bay Hotel, St. Austell, has reserved rooms for us. Proposed visits include The Eden Project and Tregrehan, others are to be confirmed.

Would those who wish to receive further details please send, as soon as possible, a SAE envelope (A5) to: Alun Edwards, 12, Eilerslie Road, Barnstaple, Devon. EX31 2HT.

Spring Tour 2003 – Belgium

– 30th April to 4th May 2003

Arrangements are now well advanced for this tour. The visit includes a visit to the National Botanic Garden of Belgium, the Kalmthout Arboretum and a number of private gardens, many specialising in rhododendrons and associated plants. This will include the private garden of Tony Suffeleers, rhododendron collector and hybridiser, and that of Antoon Declercq with around 2000 rhododendron specimens. The cost is likely to be about £500 per person with flights.

For more information contact:

Mrs V. Archibold, Starveacre, Dalwood, East Devon, EX13 7HH. Telephone 01404 881221.

MEMBERS NOTES

Mrs Christian Lamb writes from Cornwall:

Having just read your smart new Autumn Bulletin No. 78, from cover to cover, I can find no mention of Camellias. As this is the peak season for the October/November flowering *Sasanqua* Camellias I feel obliged to give them a little plug.

Camellia Sasanqua is known as the 'Mountain Tea Flower' in Japan. It is a Japanese endemic and seem to

have been overlooked as an ornamental until the 17th Century. There are no noteworthy records of named garden varieties before the 1695 book *Kadan Jikinsho*, in which about fifty kinds are described.

The Japanese sasanqua camellia was traded abroad, especially to China, not for its beautiful flowers but for its seed, which secreted a special oil famed for its properties of almost magical powers of healing. In Japan itself it was valued more as a cosmetic, especially for dressing hair; it was also used as a cooking oil. The use of these shrubs, with the exceptionally fine shiny evergreen foliage, as hedges is very notable in Japan, where trimmed very long and narrow, they mark paths through parks and gardens; cut at conventional heights they make flowering fences and even conceal buildings; where we in Europe would use hornbeam or beech for the allees of the 18th Century gardens, they used camellias.

Probably the best known of these much underused plants is *Camellia sasanqua* 'Narumigata'; it was introduced to Europe from Japan in 1898, Veitch's Nursery in Exeter sent it to America in 1931. Its flower, produced in the Autumn comes from a deep pink bud, turning white but edged with pink, as it opens wide and flat; it has a musty fragrance and lasts well. There is a huge plant of it, covered in blooms throughout November in the Chelsea Physic Garden in London.

Still flowering now in December in my small garden in Cornwall besides the above, are *C. sasanqua* 'Jean May', a hybrid bred in Florida from unknown seed parents, which has shell pink double flowers; *C. sasanqua* 'Papaver', beautiful pale pink large single flowers and petals of a poppy like texture, climbs up a wall quite happily. *C. hiemalis* (similar to sasanqua) 'Dazzler' is a very bright red large semi-double and wellnamed; *C. hiemalis* 'Kanjiro' or 'Hiryu' makes a vast bush smothered in brilliant red/pink semi-double blooms; *C. hiemalis* x 'Sparkling Burgundy' was bred in America, one of its parents being *C. sasanqua* 'Usubenii'; two of them lean against an old wall setting off their innumerable dark crimson double flowers. 'Usubenii' prostrates itself elegantly in front of a bank of later flowering camellias, whose wonderfully dark shiny leaves make a perfect background. Another chance seedling from America is *C. hiemalis* 'Chansonette', a neighbour of 'Usubenii', another delightfully spreading double camellia with ruffled petals. There are several plants of *C. sasanqua rosea* and *C. sasanqua* 'Rainbow' which add colour to the scene, and many more that I cannot fit in.

In the greenhouse are two *C. lutchuensis* crosses, 'Quintessence' a single miniature, slow growing but free flowering and not trusted to be outside during the winter yet, but supposed to have the finest fragrance to date. 'Scentuous' is the other, both crossed with japonica, it has white flushed pink small semi-double flowers and is also fragrant. Just coming out for Christmas (also in the greenhouse) is my favourite species *C. transnokoensis*, completely covered in minute white flowers edged with red and with matching edges to the tiny leaves.

But my neighbour in Lerryn will be the envy of all camellia growers, having a large plant in his dining room of *Camellia chrysantha* just coming into flower; this dramatic brilliant yellow camellia with perfect timing is the non pareil Christmas present.

Mr Thinakorn Komkris writes from Bangkok, Thailand:

'Grafting of Magnolias made easy'

I have been bud-grafting some tropical trees for three years using a procedure taught to me by my father many years ago, for his rubber trees. I took for granted that it was a standard method for bud-grafting for any other plants. When I began to be interested in magnolias a few years ago, I bought myself a 10 inch *M. x soulangeana* grown from a cutting. It did not move for almost two years, apart from a few inches of growth. I had heard that magnolias can be grafted or inarched to *Champaca* (*Michelia champaca*) stocks, so I tried to wedge-graft mine on the top of this rootstock. However, whilst working on this, I observed that the barks of both *Michelia* and *Magnolia* are easy to peel and this reminded me that such conditions strongly favoured the bud-grafting I was used to. I tried it and it worked so nicely. A new bud shot up in a few months, much higher than my plant raised from a cutting in two years. I began to graft all *Magnoliaceae* around me, natives and exotics; most of them worked out well. I can almost say that my attraction to magnolias is based on their ease of propagation. Unfortunately, there are not too many cultivars available in my country to use as scions. I always asked friends who travelled abroad to bring back just magnolia twigs, that would be good enough for me for my new magnolias. At first, I only did bud-grafts, but I hate to throw away the tops of these twigs. So I did a little modification of my method for side-grafting as well.

I was surprised when people complain that grafting in magnolias is limited to skilful hands. Now I realise that grafting methods shown in most texts are slightly different to mine, it seems to require a careful operation, almost like surgery. My method is so simple and I am sure any gardener can do it. It may not produce as perfect results as professionals, but it works. I call it the "Bark-peeling Method of Grafting".

It should work on any other root-stocks, not necessarily *Champaca*, from a pencil size diameter up to half an inch or more. The bigger the rootstock, the faster the growth from the buds. Only one pre-condition is required, that the bark must be readily peeled off. I observed that in some species the bark may not peel at certain a certain season or period, and grafting does not work if this occurs.

The equipment I use is simply a sharp kitchen knife, a roll of plastic grafting tape plus a 6-inch polythene bag in the case of side-grafting.

For **Chip-budding**, the procedure starts with making a cut across the stock down to the wood, then peeling down the bark by about 1_ inches. The width can be as wide as the bud chip you use. The bark can be trimmed so that it looks straight, but it is better not to disturb the wound unnecessarily and keep it as clean as possible. Cut off the lower portion of the bark so that it makes a rectangular pit. Slice a bud from the scion longitudinally about 2 inches long and as thin as possible, but the chip must have a thin layer of wood inside. Peel the wood off if possible – but not necessarily. Do not force the peeling, a bud-chip with a thin layer of wood will still work.

The bud chip can be sliced further down if it is too thick. Fit it into the pit and trim off the excess upper and lower portion. Wrap the grafting tape starting from the bottom, as tight as the tape will stand, but gently around the protruding bud, and tightly again around the upper portion.

Almost any bud can be used, provided that they are not from a very soft new shoot. The best ones are dormant buds from the previous year. Even buds with a petiole on can be used (the petiole can be used as a 'pan handle'), but it should be reduced to about 1/8th inch or as long as the protruding bud, before the binding reaches the bud area. It can help to protect the bud and also press the bud tight. However, buds with petioles on should be unwrapped after about ten days to remove the petiole which will by then break off or otherwise should be removed to prevent rot damage. Rewrap again thoroughly. The union can take place in two weeks and when the union is sound the bud-chip will remain green. The top of the root stock can be cut off in three weeks or a month and the tape removed. There is no seasonal limit **in my country** so the new bud will shoot up soon after. In other climates I suggest you follow the rest of the procedure for Chip-budding.



1. Peeling



2. Pit ready + Bud chip



3. Matching



4. Wrapping

For **Side-Grafting**, the tops of the root stocks should be cut off to about one foot high, preferably one or two days before grafting so that the wound will seal. Make a bark peeling pit as in but grafting, about 3-4 inches from the top cut and the pit itself should be 2-3 inches long and as wide as the scion wood. The scion is taken from a young stem tip, but not from the very young new growth, and should be some 3-4 inches long with all the foliage removed. The scion stem should now be sliced longitudinally on one side so as to make a 2-3 inch taper cut. Match this cut into the pit in the stock and bind. The wrapping does not need to be watertight as in chip-budding. A 6 inch polythene bag is now placed over the plant, tying the bag 1-2 inches below the graft. This will keep the humidity high and protect from outside water entering the wound. The union can take place in about one month and the tied knot of the bag loosened to allow better air circulation after 2-3 weeks. The bag can be removed when growth begins.

I believe that my procedure can be easier and yield better results for unskilled grafters. This is because the growing tissue is exposed to a larger contact area and one does not need to so precisely match the chip to the root-stock. However, incompatibility will still exist between some species as would happen in any method of grafting.

(The growing times and seasons will, of course, have to be adjusted for different climes, temperatures and light levels, but I am sure that we can learn from this interesting article– Ed.)

CAMELLIAS

Jennifer Trehane

Scented camellias

It is not often that camellia perfume can be smelled in the air; you usually have to put your nose close to the bloom, although there are a number of species which are sufficiently strongly scented, especially when temperatures rise, and give their perfume more freely.

When in a large public garden near Nantes a few years ago we smelled a sweet perfume and traced it to a camellia with japonica like foliage marked 'Cutter'. (A seedling named after Dr Robert Cutter from California, who, working with Dr Clifford Parks and others was active in early work on breeding for perfume).

There are a few C. japonica cultivars with some degree of scent. It seems to be a matter of different olfactory senses in different people. For example I can't smell anything from 'Scentsation' or 'Kramer's Supreme', but find 'Scented Red' (1987), which is being marketed by Trewidden Nursery in Cornwall, has quite a good scent. New Zealand camellia breeder, Jim Finlay, has a rigid test for his new cultivars. He invites a group of friends to a Scent testing day and gets all his seedlings graded 1-5 according to their perfume. Anything less than "4" is confined to the bonfire, however good the appearance of

the blooms. Only those graded "5" by a good majority are propagated up for second generation future assessment.



C. 'Scented Red'

Jennifer Trehane

Most of the autumn/winter flowering *sasanqua*, *hiemalis*, *vernalis* camellias have some degree of scent, or is it better described as "smell" ? It is rather pungent.

I prefer the scent provided by some of the other species. *C. grijsii*, *C. kissii*, *C. lutchuensis*, *C. yuhsienensis*, (regarded by some as a synonym for *C. grijsii*), and *C. transnokoensis* all provide a much sweeter perfume. Some have clones which are more strongly scented than others. None are hardy enough for year round outdoor cultivation in the UK, except in some warm, sheltered gardens in the south west or in some urban gardens with a warm micro climate. They are best kept under glass in winter and, since they all flower in early Spring, their scent can be fully appreciated in the confined space of a conservatory or glasshouse. If grown in containers, they can be put outdoors for the summer when all danger of frost is over. *C. lutchuensis* and *C. transnokoensis* have attractive red or bronze young growth.

C. transnokoensis, from Taiwan, is a particularly attractive species as it is relatively slow growing and forms a neat, upright plant. With small leaves and a profusion of tiny white flowers, followed by attractive red young growth it is certainly worth seeking out. Hybrids, using its pollen on *C. japonica* cultivars are also becoming available, notably 'Sweet Jane' (1992), from Australia. It has lovely peony form 6cm pale pink blooms shading to deeper pink in the centre and attractive copper bronze young growth.

If it can be obtained, the dwarf form of *C. lutchuensis* is worth seeking out for conservatory use. Like its more vigorous form, it has very small leaves, which are red when young and tiny white flowers tinged with pink with a lovely sweet perfume.

C. lutchuensis has been used extensively, as a source of scent, for hybridisation.

'Scentuous' was an early introduction from Jim Finlay in New Zealand. With quite a nice sweet scent it is spoiled

by having very pale green leaves which tend to get brown blotches on older leaves.



C. 'Spring Mist'

Jennifer Trehane

'Sweet Emily Kate' (1987), from Ray Garnett in Australia is a popular scented '*japonica x lutchuensis*' cultivar in the southern hemisphere but 'Spring Mist' (1982) bred by Dr Clifford Parks when he worked at the Los Angeles Arboretum, is much more widely available in the UK. In the recent mild winters it has done well outdoors in sheltered gardens in the south, producing a profusion of small pale pink sweetly scented 5cm blooms from early spring.

'Fragrant Pink', is better, particularly if it can be given plenty of room as it is vigorous and likes to cascade if allowed, with its vivid pink small peony form flowers scattered down the stems. It is hardy outdoors in the south.

'Quintessence' (1985), a *C. japonica x C. lutchuensis* cultivar bred by John Lesnie in New Zealand, was first imported into the UK by wholesalers Duncan & Davis and made an impact on a Coghurst nursery exhibit at the RHS in the mid 1990's. Its slow spreading habit make it an ideal choice where glasshouse space is limited and it looks good in a hanging basket for a few years too.



C. 'Cinnamon Cindy'

Jennifer Trehane

'Cinnamon Cindy', (1974) is another, much older *C. japonica x C. lutchuensis* cultivar which has a nice scent. Bred by Dr Ackerman in the US its scent is sweet,

tinged with a slightly aromatic perfume and it produces pale pink 5cm flowers on an upright bush with rather pale small leaves.

Neville Haydon, in New Zealand, had some interesting un-named *C. grijsii* x *C. saluenensis* and *C. japonica* x *C. transnokoensis* seedlings in flower when I last visited in 1997, both with neat pale pink flowers and good scent. Worth looking out for.

Some forms of *C. saluenensis* have quite a good, sweet scent. The vivid purple/pink 'Exbury form' is a case in point. A useful source of genes when combined with *C. japonica*.

'Salab' is quite well scented *japonica* x *saluenensis* which produces masses of seeds and has been used extensively as a parent for scented cultivars. I particularly like 'Scented Sun'; a beautiful quite large, (12.5cm) pure white semi-double with very occasional pink stripes, nicely set off by good dark green leaves and a tidy upright habit. It has a pleasant "apple blossom" scent and I find it has the added bonus of being easy to propagate.

With an ongoing search for "something different" its is not surprising that breeding camellias with perfume/scent is a challenge for breeders. All we ask is for "stronger perfume AND hardiness". Too much to ask? We'll see.

BOOK REVIEW

Graham Rankin

Magnolias in Cornish Gardens

Paintings: Valentine S Paton: Text: Jean A Paton

ISBN 1 899526 07 2. Published September 2001

At a recent lecture, I (tongue in cheek) likened keen rhododendron enthusiasts to mycologists and bryologists by stating that they are the 'anoraks' of the botanical world. Those who have seen a group of such enthusiasts, hand lenses at the ready, excitedly debating each plant's minute botanical differences, should understand where I am coming from.

In reality, I have the utmost respect and admiration for them, as they really do appreciate the intricacy, beauty and individuality of each plant. Another group of plant admirers that possess this rare quality are botanical artists, whose powers of observation and meticulous attention to detail is to be marvelled. These talents are very evident in this authoritative book, which beautifully combines the work of both the observant writer and botanical illustrator.

The illustrations are botanically accurate, more sketch-like in quality than either the plates in Johnson's 'Asiatic Magnolias in Cultivation' or Marjorie Blamey's illustrations in Neil Treseder's coffee table book 'The Book of Magnolias' published in 1981.

At the time I intended to purchase this latter book at the earliest opportunity, but I was so disappointed by the reproduction of the illustrations, I left it on the shelf.

I was a little disappointed with the harshness of the colour in some of the illustrations in 'Magnolias in Cornish Gardens'. However, most are accurate, and some really do depict a rich and sumptuous depth of colour.

The book will be a very helpful reference for identifying specimens, as the illustrations are not only of the flower, but cover various stages of flowers development, individual tepals, stamens and the gynandrophore as a whole, also usefully the seed pods and outline drawings of leaf shape.

It is a book of mammoth proportions, measuring 30cm. x 43cm., with 156 pages, 103 plates with 126 plants illustrated. The text is concise but informative, and mentions the origins, characteristics and in which garden the particular plant is grown. At the rear of the book there is a very useful Gazetteer of all the gardens mentioned in the text.

'Magnolias in Cornish Gardens' re-captivates the excitement of exploring Cornwall's wonderful gardens and encountering the extensive range of Magnolias that are represented in them. It has a limited print run of just 500 copies and over half of these have been purchased by the pre-publication named subscribers. One should not be put off by the £70 price tag, as this classy treatise really does complement previous publications and will no doubt always be sought after.

Books may be purchased on-line from Alexander Associates. www.nder.com/books/magnolias.htm

LETTERS

R. ponticum

Dear Editor,

Martin Gates is right to draw attention to the harm the campaign against *ponticum* is doing to the perception of all rhodos amongst the public at large. This was made worse by Sir David Attenborough's TV series on the state of the Earth. In the programme on the problems caused by alien plant species, he spoke from an area of *ponticum* clearance work in North Wales where it spreads by seed. Certainly it is a serious problem there and could be in similar very high rainfall areas, but here in Nottinghamshire I have examined old stands of *ponticum* planted in Victorian times as cover for game and find that it is unable to reproduce by seed – the ground is too dry. I suspect this will apply to much of the country as well. It would have been better if he had picked Japanese Knotweed as an example of an undesirable alien plant; that plant can go wild anywhere in the country!

Sir David also said that rhododendrons poison the soil which prevents other plants from growing. If this bizarre assertion were true, Judy and I would not have been able to grow lilies and meconopsis amongst our rhodos, never mind having to weed out brambles from under them!

Steven Thompson,

Nottingham.

Dear Editor,

The phrase used by Martin Gates that "they are not all like ponticum" is largely true, but self-propagation of rhododendrons is a complex subject.

In the garden here, an initial planting of *R. luteum* has now spread to within a radius of 6 metres, with second generation plants now flowering and seeding. Within a century, three plants may have colonised 1 acre (0.4 hectare)! Furthermore, members of the Triflora section are quite good at reproduction, while at Clyne Castle and Portmeirion, occasional seedlings of Grandia section appear.

However, germination is enhanced by the presence of cultivated or disturbed earth, so a degree of weediness may be desirable.

Climate plays a part, with the west coastal regions offering prime conditions for the germination of rhododendron seed, which can remain viable in the soil for a considerable time.

There are many hybrids which rarely set viable seed and these should be labelled accordingly in works of reference.

On self-layering, again some species and cultivars are more prone than others, and here a large specimen of *R. morii* produces half a dozen well rooted layers each year without human help, while more fastigate subjects must be pegged. Finally there is the question of stock growth from grafted plants, which has resulted in many older gardens being choked with *ponticum*, *maximum*, *catawbiense* and intermediate hybrids. With modern propagating methods now widely available, it is high time growers abandoned the practice. "Graft only when all else fails." (Peter Cox.)

On a practical note, try planting grafted rhododendrons with the graft set well below soil level and thus encourage the plant to produce roots above that point.

Geoff Taylor, Pant-yr-Holiad Garden, Ceredigion

Dear Editor,

I must agree with Martin Gates that publicity about ponticum seems to have tarnished all rhododendrons in the eye of the general public. Last spring I was at a house warming of a friend's recently acquired holiday home and admired a nice line of hardy hybrids bordering the front garden. He said his neighbours were pressing him to have them out as they "would pollute the surrounding countryside" this in the middle of a row of houses on the outskirts of a small town and a few yards from the sea. I spent quite a long time telling him about ponticum (and its presumed hybrid with a hardy American cousin which may be the real villain) and how different these were from the bulk of the genus and I hope he was persuaded to keep the bushes, none more than five years old so very unlikely to be grafted.

Curious to see who these neighbours were I was dismayed to find them to be couple who attend nearly every natural history walk and meeting and who I would have hoped would be more informed on the real threat. I haven't tackled them yet - I am gathering my resources, checking my facts and awaiting the opportune moment to pounce! I count myself a committed environmentalist and am very

aware of the dangers of exotic plants escaping into the wild. At the moment I am more worried by the yellow flowered variegated wild nettle which here in Pembrokeshire grows like wildfire and is reported to be eliminating snowdrops, oxalis and even bluebells from any woodland it can reach. Perhaps we could pit lamium against ponticum and then mop up the survivors!

Eileen Wheeler,

Crymych, Pembs. Wales

Bud damage – Squirrels?

Dear Editor,

Last Spring, two of my big leaved rhododendrons, *R. rex* and *R. hodgsonii* had nearly all their buds eaten. I first suspected deer but *R. rex* was far too tall, so I can only think it was squirrels. We have sprayed them with 'Scuttle' and will spray them again later on, hoping it might save them. I would love to know if other gardens have suffered the same fate. And why only those two plants?

Lady Anne Cowdray,

Broadleas Gardens

Tender plants in the North West?

Dear Editor,

Having enjoyed my *Camellia sasanqua*, planted in an open bed, flowering through November I paused to reflect on the mild climate we enjoy on the Wirral peninsular. Then soon after I chanced upon the article by Jennifer Trehane in the 1992 Year Book where she states: "If no conservatory or cold greenhouse is available then it is certainly worth the gamble of planting (*C. sasanqua*) outdoors in the south of England in the shelter of a sunny, south or west-facing wall."

As I live some 200 miles north of London I thought it might be of interest to readers to describe something about the climate which we enjoy in these parts. A climate which enables us to grow many plants which might or might not succeed in the Home Counties.

The Wirral peninsular stretches from Chester to the Liverpool bay with the Mersey estuary on the one side and the Dee estuary on the other. Thus we gain from the Gulf Stream being cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter than most of our island which is remote from the sea. Our first frosts often come in December. The climate of the country as a whole does seem to have been milder in recent years than say 50 years ago and so I find difficulty, by reading articles written in the past, in determining the extent to which I can grow the more tender varieties outside. I will continue to try by trial and error!

R. burmanicum will flower for me in open bed but often not all the buds will develop; I see that Cox gives this a hardiness rating of H2-3, minimum -12 to -15 C.

R. lindleyi L&S from Cox again H2-3 does well for me in an east facing angle of the house. I have a plant of *R. burmanicum* which will be planted close to this.

R. johnstoneanum H2-3, I have in two forms, one from Cox which grows upright and one from Ness Gardens which spreads! Both flower in open beds, as do *R. ciliatum* H3-4, *R. fletcherianum* H4, *R. formosum* H2-3 and *R. valentinianum* H2-3.

I know that others in this district and along the North Wales coast do well outside but that you only seem to have to go a bit inland for difficulties to arise.

John Harsant,

Newton House, Heswell.

Bulletin binders?

Hi John,

I was delighted to receive the latest, color version of the Newsletter! Now that I have a real good reason to save them, I'm up against a problem I hope you can help with. Apparently your standard paper size is somewhat different than that used in the USA. Yours is longer and narrower. I wonder if the RHS has available for sale binders for storing such things that would fit the paper similar to the ones available from the ARS for storing Journals. Any suggestions? Thanks in advance.

Joe Bruso,

Hopkinton, MA, USA

(Any one else wanting binders for the new Bulletin? – Contact the Hon. Editor; we could investigate the cost of suitably embossed binders.)

BRANCH REPORTS

New Forest Branch

Martin Gates

On 13th May fourteen members enjoyed a visit to Dr Ray Thornton's collection at Dibden, on the west side of Southampton Water.

This visit was postponed from 22nd April owing to frost damage. The collection comprises 110 species and 300 hybrids, and provided ample interest for our visit.

The plants included a number of North American and German hybrids, some of which were new to many of us. Particularly striking were Rhododendrons 'George's Delight', 'Nancy Evans', 'Lem's Tangerine' and 'Oh Canada', a singular hybrid by John Lofthouse. The species collection included *R's. eximium*, *falconeri*, *glischrum*, *hookeri*, *montroseanum* and *rex*.

A week later, on 20th May, ten members visited Lady Cowdray's garden at Broadleas, Devizes. The garden contains a wide variety of plants, including many unusual trees as well as rhododendrons and magnolias.

On 17th November, we were very pleased to welcome Maurice Foster at Jermyn's House, located in the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, who gave us an excellent lecture on his travels in Western China and the Himalaya.

Reminder for Branch Shows:

S.E Branch – 20th April at Ardingly College.

Contact: Everard Daniel – 01737 242795

North West England & North Wales Branch

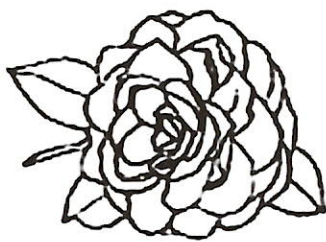
– 11th & 12th May at Ness Botanic Gardens.

Contact: Mike Reddington – 0151 353 16081

Wessex Branch – 19th May at 'Ramster'.

Contact: Miranda Gunn – 01428 644422

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NOTICES

Joey Warren

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Group will be held on Tuesday 23rd April at The Royal Horticultural Society, London in the Lawrence Hall (which used to be called The New Halls) in Room 22 at 2.00pm.

Please note the new time; the committee decided to hold the AGM before the Committee meeting, in the hope that more people will be able to attend. This is, of course, the first day of the Main Rhododendron Show.

The Chairman, Maurice Foster, was elected at the 2001 AGM for a period of 3 years. All the Officers are willing to continue, and they need to be confirmed in post.

The retiring Committee Members, whose 3-year term of office has ended and therefore must retire, are **John Harsant** and **Alastair Stevenson**. They are both willing to serve a further 3-year term. No other nominations have been received. You are invited to confirm them in post. Alastair is our publicity officer.

The committee was sorry to lose the services of John Hilliard, who retired last Spring; also Eileen Wheeler who produced the Bulletin for 6 years so well for The Group, unfortunately her family commitments demanded more of her time. They are replaced by Dr Mike Robinson, Chairman of Southeast branch; and by John Rawling, who came in just the right time to produce the smarter new-look Bulletin.

Please complete the **Voting Form**, sent with this Bulletin, and return it to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs Joey Warren, Netherton, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 7NL by **Friday 19th April 2002**, making due allowance for postal delivery.

Subscriptions

New Members and lapsed Members subscriptions should be sent to the Membership Secretary, Miranda Gunn. (It is still only £15.00).

Subscription and Credit Card details can be posted, telephoned, faxed or E-mailed to Mrs Miranda Gunn, 'Ramster', Chiddingfold, Surrey, GU8 4NS.

Telephone 01428 644422, Fax 01428 656345 or

E-mail: Ramster@bigfoot.com

STOP PRESS ... 2002 YEAR BOOK

We have just discovered that the mailing of the Year Book outside the UK was, in error, sent surface mail by our printers, instead of airmail as instructed. Hopefully all have by now been delivered, but we would like to apologise to all our members outside the UK.

Philip Evans Hon. Year Book Editor.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Philip Evans

The 2002 Competition

Dr G. B. Hargreaves won the Photographic Competition in the 2002 Year Book with a study of what he described as an 'unknown yellow magnolia'. After the Year Book had gone to the printers Dr Hargreaves was able to tell me that the magnolia has been identified by Jim Gardiner as M. 'Yellow Bird'.

The 2003 Photographic Competition

The Competition will again be run for the 2003 Edition of the Year Book. The winner received a cheque for £25 and the first three are printed in the Year Book. In addition there is a category for 'Best Entry by a Spouse or Partner, and for this there is a £10 prize, and the winning entry will be printed.

Entries may be either slides or prints, but not more than three entries in total per person. As usual the subject matter must be of Rhododendrons, Camellias or Magnolias, in the wild or in gardens, public or private. Entries do not necessarily have to be taken in the last 12 months, so if you have a favourite photo' from the past, why not 'give it a go'. All slides or prints will be returned after publication next January. Entries to: Philip Evans, West Netherton, Drewsteignton, Devon, EX6 6RB. Closing date is 30th June 2002.



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EXCITING ITEMS THIS YEAR INCLUDE:

Newly collected in south east Tibet, *R. lanatoides* and for the first time, *R. dignabile*. Two fine new plants for indoors or milder gardens, the yellow *R. leptocladon* from Vietnam and *R. dekatanum*. We also grow all sorts of wonderful plants such as Camellias, *Sorbus*, *Nomocharis*, *Meconopsis*, Lilies, *Kalmia latifolia*, *Omphalogramma*, etc etc.

2 NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE THIS YEAR:

The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species – (Second Edition)
by Peter A. Cox & Kenneth N.E. Cox

Due to popular demand, a **Second Edition** has been published featuring all of the original material as well as **three additional pages** featuring new species introduced since 1997. These include *R. monanthum*, *R. platypodum*, *R. miniatum*, *R. gongshanense* and several others.

Price £75 plus postage. £6.50 (UK) £8.50 (Europe and rest of the world.)

FRANK KINGDON WARD'S RIDDLE OF THE TSANGPO GORGES
New edition, Edited by Kenneth Cox, Antique Collector's Club, 2001

Original text by Frank Kingdon Ward, edited by Kenneth Cox.
Additional material by Kenneth Cox, Ken Storm Jr. and Ian Baker.
Price £35 plus £5.50 (UK), £7.50 (foreign) postage & packing.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS – Spring and Summer 2002

Date	Organiser/branch	Event	Contact
Apr. 9-10th	RHS	Main Camellia Competition	RHS
Apr. 13th	South East/Mag.Soc.	Visit to Nymans, Wakehurst and Borde Hill	Mike Robinson
Apr. 20th	North West	Visit to Members' Gardens	Ted Brabin
Apr. 20th	South East	Annual Show – Ardingly College	Everard Daniel
Apr. 20th	South West	Garden Visits – Tregothnan & Nansawan House	Alun Edwards
Apr. 23rd	Group	Group AGM & Executive Committee	Joey Warren
Apr. 23-24th	RHS	Main Rhododendron Competition	RHS
Apr. 26-30th	Group	Tour of Devon	Valerie Archibold
Apr. 26-28th	North West	Tour of Scottish Gardens	Ted Brabin
Apr. 27th	Wessex	Visit to Sandling Park	Miranda Gunn
May 1-4th	Cornwall G.S.	Annual Show at Trelissick	
May 4th	SRS	Show & AGM – Oban	
May 6th	SRS	Garden Visits – Argyll and Bute	
May 11th	South West	Garden Visits – Gorwell Hse & Elm Hse	Alun Edwards
May 11-12th	North West	Branch Show – Ness Botanic Gardens	Ted Brabin
May 14th	South East	Visit to Exbury	Mike Robinson
May 16-20th	RBGE + RHS	Rhodo 02, International Conference	Dr. George Argent
May 18th	New Forest	Visit to private garden at Broadstone	Martin Gates
May 19th	Wessex	Annual Show – Ramster	Miranda Gunn
May 21-24th	RHS	Chelsea Flower Show	RHS
May 24-29th	Group	Tour of Germany	Valerie Archibold
July 6th	South East	Annual Propagation Day	Mike Robinson
Oct. 17-20th	Group/ICS	Autumn Tour to Cornwall	Alun Edwards
Nov. 16th	Wessex	Lecture – Jennifer Trehane	M. Nash
Nov. 16th	New Forest	Lecture – M. Baron: South East Tibet	Martin Gates

Abbotsbury Planting – The John Bond Memorial Collection.

Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens, in Dorset, are in a sheltered valley within sound of the sea and protected by towering oaks from the prevailing gales.

Some 25 officers, branch chairmen and members of the Group plus guests, gathered with garden staff to inaugurate the planting. Guests of honour were Susan & Peter Lewis, daughter and son-in-law of the late John Bond, former Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group Chairman. Susan began the planting with a rare specimen of the *Falconera* series (AC 431), raised from seed collected in Vietnam. Roy Lancaster paid tribute to John Bond as an inspirational plantsman with a particular love and exceptional knowledge of rhododendrons. He had developed a special affection for Abbotsbury through his visits as an informal advisor to the curator, Stephen Griffith, and thus the choice of this garden was particularly appropriate. The site provides perfect conditions for the growing and viewing of these plants.

The collection, supplied by the Millais nursery, comprises some 45 plants of known provenance. It includes *R. protistum* var. *giganteum* (see last month's Bulletin) of George Forrest fame, *R. kesangiae*, *R. rex* ssp. *gratum*, *R. macabeanum*, *R. montroseanum*, *R. sinofalconeri* etc.

raised from seed, all identified under collectors numbers. The ceremony took place in perfect rhododendron weather, of gentle but steady rain! A happy occasion and a site worthy of these healthy specimens of wild collected plants.

It is well worth a detour to see this lovely garden and the Group's planting if you are in the area.

