



The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN - 92

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

NOVEMBER 2006

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Mike Robinson

Autumn once more, bringing with it the time to take stock of events in the garden, and hasn't it been an extraordinary year? Spring was full of flower: I am unlikely to forget the visit to Caerhays on a perfect sunny day with all the magnolias anyone could wish for at their absolute peak, and the sight of even the myriad bronze velvet buds on *M. doltsopa* absolutely stunning. Little frost to spoil even the earlier rhododendrons, and the camellias so covered in flower as to make their foliage indiscernible. Then high, high, high temperatures together with drought, making life worrying and tedious for everyone except for those sun worshippers who were lucky enough not to have to work. I will write more about that in the yearbook. And now, as I write in the middle of October never a sign of frost (not so unusual in Sussex but no frost in most of Scotland either). The soil is moist again and still warm, with temperatures approaching 70 (in old measure) on a daily basis, so time for a positive frenzy of planting, and it has been a wrench to stop and make time to write these notes.

Time also to reflect on what I am planting – very few rhododendrons, camellias or magnolias, but many other genera – eucryphia, sorbus, berberis, viburnum, roses and even a few herbaceous plants (bulbs I take for granted) in order to introduce more diversity and make this garden less of a collection.

Very little leaf fall or autumn colour here yet – still much to look forward to before winter which brings the tedious but essential job of making labels for everything that has been planted in the months before.

The amount of fruit set on the magnolia is truly remarkable (in all senses of that word), and it is nice to approach the levels set on a regular basis in climes such as New Zealand and the USA. If this were to continue it might be worth more of us trying to join the lone John Carson in his clever attempts to produce new magnolia hybrids. All of us, however, can enjoy the spectacular sight of a magnolia laden with fruit. In the words of a sculptress neighbour 'I have never seen anything like it for form and colour – nature provides the best inspiration.'

continued on page 2



The autumn colours of *M. 'Forrest's Pink'*

Photo Mike Robinson.

IN THIS ISSUE	Page
Chairman's Notes	1-2
Editor's Notes	2-3
Tours	3-4
Winter Hardiness in Rhododendrons - David Millais	5-6
Magnolias - 2006 Season - Maurice Foster	6-7
Rhododendron News	7
Letters	8-9
Branch Reports	9-10
Membership – New Members	11
Notices	11
Coming Events	12

I did manage to drag myself away from the garden long enough to enjoy thoroughly the Group autumn tour - the first that Judy Hallet has organised for us: she has set the highest of standards, and we are very grateful for her inspired and meticulous planning and execution.

Seed List

The Group has a new 'seed man'. Chip Lima has stepped down due to pressure from other commitments, and I should like to record our thanks for his efforts during the past two years. I am very grateful to Gerald Dixon volunteering to take on this onerous but important task. Please note that seed should be sent to him - his address is in the member's list, but for convenience I give it again here:- Gerald J. Dixon, Brooklands, Shute, Axminster, Devon EX13 7QF.

Please clean the seed before sending it - not too much of a chore for the sender, but imagine having to clean a hundred batches. Magnolias seed should be soaked and the coloured coating removed, then packed in damp (not wet!) vermiculite or peat - detailed instructions are in the new member's booklet or on the website. Camellia seed should be similarly packed once it has been removed from the seed body. Magnolia and Camellia seed should not be allowed to dry out. Rhododendron seed, on the other hand, should be kept dry once removed from its capsule and sieved.

Taxonomy Ph. D at Edinburgh

Progress continues with the Rhododendron taxonomy Ph.D. at Edinburgh. There were a large number of applicants for the studentship, most of whom very highly qualified. After a taxing time for those interviewing and evaluating previous research work and references the position was awarded to Tobias Marczewski from Germany. He has an outstanding excellent academic record, and, besides his studies in systematic botany at organic and molecular levels, has field experience in Peru and Chile. He has strong interests in speciation and ecology, and we may look forward to significant results from his research.

Wilson Study Day

Finally may I issue a formal invitation to all Group members and their friends to the Wilson Study Day to be held on April 4th 2007 in the Lecture Theatre, Lawrence Halls, Vincent Square, London

The event has been prompted by Mark Flanagan and Tony Kirkham's recent retracing of Wilson's steps in Sichuan, and by their renewed interest in assembling a collection of his plants.

The programme will start with an account of Wilson's life by Roy Briggs, the author of the biography published a few years ago, and a descendant of the great plant hunter himself. It will continue with presentations on the widest possible selection of the plants Wilson introduced, and will conclude with Tony Kirkham assessing Wilson's contribution from the present day point of view of both Western gardens and in China.

Tickets cost £15, and are available by telephoning 0845 612 1253, or by sending payment to the RHS Membership Dept., 80, Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE, U.K., being sure to mention the 'Wilson Study Day, April 4th.'

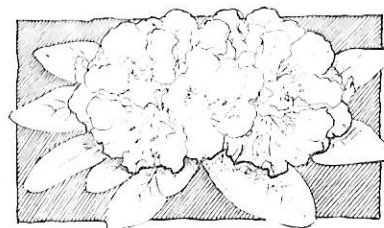
The full programme is given below:-

Wilson Study Day - 4th April 2007 at RHS

10.00 for 10.30	Arrival and coffee	
10.30 - 11.15	Wilson's life	<i>Roy Briggs</i>
11.15 - 12.00	Wilson's woody plants	<i>Maurice Foster</i>
12.00 - 12.30	Wilson's magnolias	<i>Jim Gardiner</i>
12.30 - 1.45	Lunch break	
1.45 - 2.30	Wilson's Sichuan - then and now	<i>Mark Flanagan</i>
2.30 - 3.00	Wilson's rhododendrons	<i>Mike Robinson</i>
3.00 - 3.30	Tea break	
3.30 - 4.30	Bulbs and herbaceous plants	<i>Chris Grey-Wilson</i>
4.30 - 5.15	Wilson's contribution in perspective	<i>Tony Kirkham</i>



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EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

RHS Tatton Park Flower Show 2006

Our thanks and congratulations go to John Harsant and his band of helpers for having an excellent stand at this show. They won a Bronze Medal.

John Harsant reports:

"The award of a Bronze medal was accompanied by some very helpful remarks from the Judges which pointed the way for the future. The medal itself was in the Lindley Group (Scientific and Education Interest) and encourages me to place the emphasis in the future on the increasing number of projects of the Group. Attendance at the shows of the RHS is necessary to increase the awareness by members of the RHS and the public of our efforts.

We were successful in recruiting new members and helped many with their problems. Apart from this, the event was marked by the great friendship between all those involved in the Stand. Thank you everybody.

Kris Hulewicz the Show Manager was kind enough to say

"The Shows Dept. were delighted with your presence and I do hope to see the Group at Tatton in the future. I believe it is vital to the Society's work in the North West to have your support, kindest regards, Kris."

Seed importation to the United States

I understand from Pam Hayward that there are new regulations being introduced for US importers of small quantities of seed.

This information is available from:

<http://www.alpinegardensociety.net/servlet/articleservlet?command=visitarticles&sitearea=seed&category=seed>.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I still 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 Bulletin by 14th February.

Please send to:

John Rawling, Hon. Bulletin Editor,

The Spinney, Station Road,

Woldingham, Surrey, CR3 7DD.

Tel. 01883 653341 or E-mail: jr.eye@virgin.net

TOURS

Judith Hallett

Tour Report

**The Joint Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group
and ICS Autumn Tour 2006 - 21st to 24th September**

When promoting this tour in an earlier bulletin I mentioned that we would be staying at a 'peaceful' hotel in Herefordshire. And so perhaps it was, until members of the tour arrived! Members of the group, together with members of the International Camellia Society quickly made themselves at home over dinner. David Farnes set the tone on the first evening by asking us to drink a toast to what he reminded us was the 25th Autumn weekend.

I am grateful to those who agreed to put pen to paper to provide reports each day and to others who recorded the weekend on camera, so that we have a visual reminder of the tour to accompany the text.

Judith Hallett



Visiting Little Llanavon.

Photo: Luise Wolff-Boresch

Friday

On the first day of the tour we visited three gardens, each one quite different and delightful in their own unique way.

Little Llanavon is a private cottage garden in the Golden Valley owned by John and Jenny Chippindale. The garden overlooked delightful countryside with sheep grazing beyond the stone boundary wall. Jenny's creative skill with textiles was evident in the harmonious colours and textures used in her planting of perennials while a small part of the garden was influenced by the writing of Noel Kingsbury whom we were to meet later in the tour. *Stipa gigantea*, golden *Rudbeckia* and purple michaelmas daisies provided striking colour for our visit. Mistletoe was growing in the old apple trees, reminding us that we weren't far away from Tenbury where there is a seasonal sale of this plant each year.

Judith

Abbey Dore Court Garden was built around a former inn on the Abbey Dore estate in the Golden Valley and owned by Mrs Charis Ward and her family. Over the years since 1967 the garden has been changed in shape by the sale of the house and garden next to it and by planting a meadow, across the river Dore, with rare trees and shrubs. We enjoyed an organic buffet lunch at the award-winning Stable tea-room where there were excellent salads using herbs and produce from the garden.

The Laskett is a very personal garden built by Sir Roy Strong and his late wife Julia Trevelyn-Oman over the last 30 years. It is a very much a memorial to their lifetimes' achievements and associations. Sir Roy guided us through many individual gardens surrounded by yew hedges with carefully planned vistas: there was excitement round every

corner, not least from the fine statues and monuments which included memorials to his favourite cats. One monument had just the word 'CIRCUMSPICE' around the initials of Sir Roy and his wife, together with the date when the garden development began (1973): reminding us of the inscription to Sir Christopher Wren in St. Paul's Cathedral 'SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS CIRCUMSPICE' – 'if you seek a memorial look around you'.

Back at the Pilgrim Hotel we had to earn our dinner! Our horticultural knowledge was put to the test through a tree and shrub identification quiz, from just the leaf, set by Alastair Stephenson, including both common and unusual specimens from his own garden. After dinner Mike Robinson gave a presentation with wonderful pictures showing the great diversity of rhododendrons seen on the Spring 2006 tour to Vancouver and the western United States.

Peter James

Saturday

We travelled north west to Kington to visit **Hergest Croft**, the home of three generations of the Banks family and famous for its fine collection of champion trees, second only to the number at Kew. Over coffee we were welcomed by Lawrence Banks and given an introduction and brief history of the estate, before setting out to tour the extensive estate.

Park Wood, originally a steep sided grass lined valley is now a ravine with dense woodland including many choice magnolias and rhododendrons, likened by some as being more like a Himalayan glade. Our guides in this area were Ros, Lawrence and Elizabeth Banks, together with Mark, the gardener responsible for this area of the estate.

Our guide for the more open part of the garden and the arboretum to the north west of the house was head gardener, Stephen Lloyd. Here we were delighted to see many new or recent plantings of trees grown from seed collecting expeditions, many giving colourful displays of autumn fruits and foliage and outstanding barks. *Malus* and *Sorbus*, especially Aucuparia section were noted, whilst *Betula* in great variety showed their stems to perfection in the Autumn sunshine.

On leaving we presented a plant of *Rhododendron sikangense* AC2051 with our thanks for a wonderful tour.

In the afternoon we travelled to **Stockton Bury** garden in Kimbolton, near Leominster. We found ourselves in a 'place of timeless beauty' where we were free to wander at will in the warm sunshine. This four acre garden was opened to the public for the first time in 1995 after extensive work by the current owners, Raymond Treasure and Gordon Fen. Originally part of the adjoining farm, the garden now consists of more than twenty compartments laid out on many different levels which create an element of surprise for the visitor. The planting is too numerous to list in this report but includes every conceivable form of gardening from fruits and vegetables, rockery and water features, herbaceous borders, roses, clematis, to shrubs and small trees. Small that is except for the enormous *Araucaria araucana* (monkey puzzle tree) which we estimated to be more than 90 feet in height! This was truly a garden for all seasons and all interests.

We broke our journey back to the hotel to enjoy a sumptuous, traditional farmhouse tea at Woonton Court, the home of ICS member Elizabeth Thomas. Elizabeth is a long standing supporter of our tours and it was a pleasure to have so many of her family (three generations) to look after us in their lovely period farmhouse.

After dinner Noel Kingsbury, writer, garden designer and critic gave a talk entitled 'Wild Style Planting', introducing us to some fresh ideas for creating a more natural feel to our gardens.

David Farnes

Sunday

Alastair and Janet Stephenson moved from Chiswick to a site in Herefordshire with plenty of space to indulge their passion for gardening. It is already beginning to take shape and our visit to their garden was a delightful ending to our Autumn tour.

On a paved area around the house were pots of *Acer palmatum*, numerous scented-leaved geraniums and tufts of *Erigeron mucronatus*. A specimen of *Rhododendron* 'Fragrantissimum' which had come with them from London was now growing against the house and a specimen of *Magnolia grandiflora* was also thriving in a bed close to the drive. In the lawns beyond were plantings including a prolific young Walnut and a variety of rhododendrons and camellias. Many of these are small at present but *R. 'Hotei'* and 'Hawk Crest' are mature and flower well each spring. Similarly, several sasanqua camellias are free-flowering. A large field on the other side of the house has been planted as an arboretum with Acers, Liquidambar, Nothofagus and, in a sheltered hollow, several large-leaved rhododendrons. Finally we enjoyed coffee and delicious cakes back on the terrace before thanking our hosts with a gift of a *Davidia* for their arboretum.

Peter Furneaux

Spring Tour to South West Ireland 2007

Sun. 13th to Fri. 18th May 2007

The enclosed brochure and application form for the Spring Tour will surely appeal to everyone. It is some years since the group have visited Ireland and we have included some spectacular gardens. We shall be staying at excellent hotels, and the cost is incredibly reasonable! Do complete and return the application form to Arena as soon as possible to make sure of your place on the Spring Tour 2007.

We hope that members will wish to extend their stay in Ireland to visit some other famous gardens in the Emerald Isle.

Judy Hallett,

Honorary Tours Organiser

RHODODENDRONS

David Millais

Winter hardiness in Rhododendrons.

We are regularly asked to recommend cold tolerant plants for exposed gardens "Up North". Because our Nursery is situated in the South, customers incorrectly assume our

plants are "Southern Softies". In fact we are situated in one of the worst frost pockets in the South, being 200 metres (650ft) below Hindhead, and we regularly experience extremes of winter cold. All the frost drains down to us, and our night time low temperatures are regularly 2 degrees colder than any Met Office forecasts. The plants we grow are therefore selected and acclimatised to thrive in colder conditions. Many a time do we disappoint those who wish us to supply some of the more tender plants seen in the West Country or the West Coast of Scotland, as we do not consider it worth our while growing these. However the range of plants we can grow has increased enormously in the past 10 years, so who knows what global warming will bring?

However, conditions can be harsher in exposed parts of the North, and those requiring tougher plants should select those designated H4 by the RHS, on a scale of H1-H4. Unfortunately, confusion abounds in hardiness ratings. The American Rhododendron Society ratings work in reverse, with H1 being the toughest. Recently Kenneth Cox has introduced a new scale from H0 to H10 (which works in reverse of the USDA system) based around the outdated Fahrenheit system in his recent book "Rhododendrons and Azaleas, a colour guide", published 2005. Whilst neither the RHS nor American ratings may be perfect, yet another rating system will no doubt lead to further confusion.

It is worth pointing out that inhospitable conditions can be considerably improved with a little care over the course of a few years. Hedges, windbreaks, tree canopy and walls can all give additional shelter. Temporary shelters can also be constructed using fabric netting or a covering of fleece over the top, or even simply stuffing bracken or hessian around the base of the plant. This is particularly important during the first few years of establishment when the plant is not as hardy as a larger specimen. Take particular care of young plants at times of late spring frosts and early autumn frosts.

In early November 2005, we experienced a particularly harsh frost of -7°C after a mild Indian summer. This was our worst autumn damage for more than 10 years, with many 3 year old species such as *R. barbatum*, *habrotrichum* and *ramsdenianum* suffering terminal bark split with the sap still in the stems. As in previous years, I have found that it is not worth trying to bind the stems with grafting tape in the autumn as the plant is becoming dormant. However, when we have experienced bark split in late spring frosts, then binding the stem together with polythene budding tape or even Sellotape is particularly beneficial when done within a few days of the damage. The split will callus over, and the bark re-grows to enable a valuable plant to recover.

Over the past 2-3 years we have greatly reduced our pesticide usage on the nursery, and have used increasing amounts of tonics, and biological or organic controls for pests and diseases with great success. Although not organic, we have used high potassium foliar feeds in late summer which really benefit rhododendrons in several ways. It has recently been found to give excellent control of Powdery Mildew, it increases flower budding, and within only a few days it helps to ripen the wood in preparation for the winter. Last

year's results were very impressive. Where we had sprayed relatively tender varieties, they came through that sharp November frost better than some tough varieties which had not been treated. We even had several of Hachmann's tough German varieties such as *R. Belkanto*, *Graf Lennart* and *Goldkrone* severely defoliated where we had not sprayed. Fortunately most of these plants recovered with new growth in the spring.

When choosing varieties for cold gardens, the most important aspect is to select appropriate varieties. Actions can be taken to help with plant conditioning and wood ripening so plants survive the first harsh frosts of the autumn. More difficult are the late spring frosts which also ruin the blooms. This year in the South, we seemed to go from winter straight in to summer, with a short but colourful flowering season. More often, a prolonged warm spell in March and April forces on both growth and flower, and this can spell disaster in May with late spring frosts.

We all like to push boundaries, and try more choice and interesting plants. Instead of planting the toughest of the boring "ironclads", the following includes some of my recommendations for those seeking tough but more interesting varieties. Many have been bred by Hans Hachmann to tolerate -20C in Northern Germany. Others may need some care and attention to shelter and nutrition, aided by a little global warming, to perform in the coldest gardens. Perhaps members with coldest gardens have their own list of varieties they can share with others.

HARDY HYBRIDS

Azurro	(Deep purple);	Blue Peter	(Lavender);
Diadem#	(Pink);	Gartendirektor Rieger	(Cream);
Goldika	(Yellow);	Gomer Waterer	(Pinky white);
Grafitto	(White with blotch);		
Hachmann's Charmant	(White pink rim);		
Kabarett	(Lilac);	Mrs T H Lowinsky	(Pink);
Scintillation	(Pink);	Viscy	(Deep yellow);

See photo on p. 6

YAKS and COMPACTS

Dreamland	(Pink);	Fantastica	(Pink);
Hoppy	(Mauve);	Marlis	(Pink);
Percy Wiseman	(Pink cream);	Stadt Essen	(Pink)

DWARFS

These are alpine plants originating from high altitudes. Most should prove hardy, and will typically perform better in the cooler North, compared to the sun baked South.

SPECIES

calophytum *	(Pale pink);	degronianum	(Pink);
insigne	(Pink);	makinoi	(Pinky white);
oreodoxa	(Pink);	rex *	(Pink/ white);
rex ssp. fictolacteum *	(White);	smirnowii	(mauve pink);
yakushmanum	(Pinky white).		

* Not the hardiest, but worth trying for the foliage.

DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

R. luteum and most Exbury or Knaphill types are typically tough plants which flower after the risk of spring frosts in late May and June, but avoid the *mollis* and some *Ghent* hybrids which are prone to damage from frosts in early May. Particularly tough is the Northern Lights series, e.g. Golden Lights, Northern Hi-lights etc.



R. 'Diadem'

Photo: Millais

EVERGREEN AZALEAS

As a rule of thumb, the smaller the foliage and the flower, the tougher the plant will be. Glendoick's mammal series are good, but now there are a number of new varieties from Germany bred to withstand -20 degrees C.

Canzonetta (Reddish Pink);	Diamant Lilac (Lilac)
Geisha Orange (Orange);	Kermesina (Pink)
kusianum (Album & Pink);	Panda (White)
Rubinetta (Purple red);	Schneeperle (White)
Squirrel (Red);	Wombat (Pink)

Millais Nurseries were awarded the prestigious **Rothschild Challenge Cup** for the best exhibit of *Rhododendrons* in 2005.

Also, see the *Special Offer* details in Millais Nurseries' Advertisement on page 2.

MAGNOLIAS

Maurice Foster

An outstanding season

After a long cold winter that ran into the beginning of April, but with no excessively low temperatures and no untimely frosts, this was perhaps the best magnolia season since we began planting about 30 years ago. Some softer *campbellii* types insisted on swelling their buds according to the calendar rather than the temperature and were nipped for their impatience but for the rest a large bud set and quiet flowering weather provided an excellent combination of quantity and quality.

We actually enjoyed three magnolia seasons - first at the end of March in Cornwall, where at the Show a single room was stacked with sprays and blooms in perfect condition of many of the great *campbellii* forms, confirming Cornwall as the horticultural epicentre for these incomparable trees.

Caerhays was at its best and we were much taken with crosses between 'Lanarth' and *campbellii* and *sargentiana robusta*. Without exception, though paler, these hybrids all inherited the unmistakable Lanarth 'episcopal purple' colour tones, and perfect timing meant that the flowers were fresh and clean with scarcely a petal on the ground.

Our second season was some 10 days later, in southern Ireland, where we were privileged to spend a weekend at Mount Congreve. Again *campbellii* stole the show with scores of large trees, raised from seed and planted below a steep bank, which could be viewed with advantage on a level with the canopies; and the low early morning sun lifting through a river mist, lit the myriad flowers to perfection from behind, transforming them into brilliant pink and red/purple lanterns. There were many shades of pink, but two with vivid rich reddish flowers were especially striking. These have been named, one for Ambrose Congreve, the owner and creator of the magnificent garden and the other for Lionel de Rothschild. It is to be hoped that before too long these magnificent cultivars will become generally available.

Our third season was in our own garden away from the benign influence of the Gulf Stream. The late spring pushed back and compressed flowering times and the abundance of colour was almost too much, with everything out at once and longlasting in the quiet conditions. One memorable picture was a small plant of 'Maxine Merrill', a creamy yellow *loebneri*, standing in a sea of bluebells, with flowering exactly coinciding. Other yellows flowering well as small plants were 'Daphne', a really good colour, and 'Sunsation', very free and late with a good shape. But our stars were the *sprengeri* 'Diva' forms and hybrids. 'Lanhydrock', 'Copeland Court', 'Caerhays Belle', 'Claret Cup', 'Eric Savill', 'Galaxy', 'Spectrum', 'Raspberry Swirl' lit up the landscape, some with vivid 'clean' deep pinks. Tough and accommodating, these trees seem perfectly suited to our cooler and drier conditions, combining beauty with reliability.

The drought

May was wet with 104mm of rain, leading us into the driest and hottest summer for many years with temperatures quite often topping 30C. We missed the scattered storms and showers, dried out quickly and had recourse, with a hose ban on mains water, to our 3 large underground storage tanks of roof rainwater, which we pumped out with a small submersible pump. Two tanks are original Victorian cisterns, providing the water supply for the old hilltop 19thC house, and the third we dug a few years ago, standing four 4ft x 6ft spun concrete pipes on end, cemented in and resting on a solid concrete base. This collects water from the roof of an extension and has worked well, a cheap and easy additional supply from in effect a 16ft x 6ft cylinder.

Our other system of watering is to use plastic containers - some 2 litre, some 5 litre - with 3 pinholes made near the base to release water slowly and precisely to saturate the root system, particularly of newly planted trees. The containers are simply placed on the surface close to the stem. The holes block gradually with algae and particles and cans need an occasional shake to restart the flow. Advantages are that all the water is used exactly where it is needed, draining down

through the root system and weed growth is not encouraged as it is when water is sloshed around. It is water efficient and time, labour and cost effective – we can irrigate 60 plants in an hour in the arboretum using a small van as a carrier. And it lasts, even in heat, up to 10-14 days, with growth continuing.

Hydrangeas suffered badly, betulas partially defoliated and rhododendrons stopped growing, all stressed quite severely, but magnolias were yet again a revelation, taking the drought in their stride and revelling in the high temperatures and, unwatered, putting on excellent extension growth. Who needs global warming drought busting plants like cistus and ceanothus when you can have magnolias?

The only exceptions were plants, not in shade, of the oyama section, like wilsonii and globosa, which suffered from leaf scorch, literally sunburned.

NEWS

Glendoick Gardens Ltd. (Peter & Kenneth Cox) are launching their new Red Leaved Hybrids

These appear very striking and were revealed a few weeks ago after a 20 year hybridisation programme. Both are semi-dwarf, hardy and compact and have red undersides to the leaves.

They are making a *Special Offer* on their two new red leaved hybrids:- These are named 'Wine and Roses', with red leaves all the year round and 'Everred', with markedly red underleaves. Two three year old plants (one of each) are offered at £59.95 incl.VAT

They are only available by mail order from Glendoick: -

www.glendoick.com.



Rhododendron 'Everred'

Photo: Glendoick



Rhododendron 'Wine and Roses'

Photo: Glendoick

First Flowering in Cultivation

Rhododendron densifolium K.M.Feng

Rhododendron densifolium is a species in subgenus *Vireya*. In Dr George Argent's monograph – *Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya* – he states that *R. densifolium* was recently introduced into cultivation but is not yet known to have flowered.

Although my plant is as yet only 20cm high, this species is described as growing up to 1.3m in the wild with neat green foliage and yellow flowers. It is superficially similar to *R. vaccinioides*, cultivated for more than 70 years, but that species has white to pale pink flowers. *R. densifolium*, like *R. vaccinioides*, will probably remain a botanical curiosity rather than an important horticultural introduction, although the plant does have appeal to those who delight in the petite rather than the gaudy.



Rhododendron densifolium

Photo: Lindsey Muir. RBGE

Dr Argent's book proved invaluable during the development of the flower buds. When faced with a healthy green flower bud starting to turn brown it is hard not to fear the worst. However, Dr. Argent states that during their development the green flower buds turn brown before opening thus giving me the reassurance that my plant was flowering according to plan! Unlike most vireyas, the umbels on *R. densifolium* contain only one flower bud which is enclosed in bracts. It is these bracts maturing and then dying which cause the bud to apparently change in colour from green to brown. It was still a great relief when the dead bracts fell away leaving yellow buds which soon opened to produce the beautiful flowers pictured here.

Eric Annal

LETTERS

Following the letter from our International Chairman, Miranda Gunn, published in the last issue requesting contact and information from our members abroad, I am delighted to find that she has heard from opposite ends of the globe, and I am happy to publish them below.

Ed.

Note from Australia

I read your note in the July 2006 Bulletin upon my return to Olinda Victoria Australia from 7 weeks in Scotland, Wales, UK, and Ireland visiting gardens.

My wife and I visited a significant number of your magnificent gardens and have several thousand photos to remember them by. RBGE, Inverewe, Tatton Park, Bodnant, Wisley, College Gardens in Oxford and Powerscourt near Dublin just to name a fraction of them. My guess is we probably have seen more gardens than most of your local members. Especially when we add in 2002, 1999 and earlier and NZ US and Canada in 2005 and 2004.

There are not too many advantages in becoming a senior citizen but time and resources to visit memorable gardens is certainly one. I am editor of the Australian Rhododendron Society (Victorian Branch) Newsletter so I get to use the photos a bit. And I write up tours of some the gardens we visit, as editors must, to fill the Newsletter.

We live just 3km from National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda. In the hills outside Melbourne at an altitude of 500m. Right now we are coming into peak flowering season. The flowers match anything in the Northern Hemisphere but resources for garden maintenance are woeful. Parks Victoria has a total staff of 13 to look after 9 gardens of which NRG is only one. The Australian Rhododendron Society volunteers (about 15 regulars on Tuesday mornings) provide advice, propagation and some additional maintenance. Not nearly enough. Nor is pest control what it ought to be. It has been 4 years since azalea lace bug was properly controlled. The silver lining, we Society members hope, is that Parks is going to trial biological control this year. Azalea lace wing. If it works!

We have a 10 acre garden of our own and, thus far, with just us and a professional day a fortnight and labour a morning a week we are keeping our heads up and the weeds down.

Olinda is one of very few places in the world where almost every rhododendron can be grown in the open, from alpinas and big leaf to maddenias and vireyas. So NRG has a good collection of species and hybrids. Marcia and I are making progress in a similar direction from a standing start 10 years ago.

My special interest is vireyas. I was privileged to have a conducted tour through George Argent's RBGE collection in May. I'd love to have some of the beautiful species that are not yet in Australia.

I do have some photos for you. You can access them at <http://picasaweb.google.com/simonwbegg/Beechmont/September2006>

As you will see *R. tuba* is my favourite. It grows and flowers best of any vireyas at Olinda both in our garden and at NRG. Some 3m+. Who can complain of a flowering period, in my case, from mid May until October?

Generally the differences I find between our rhodos and UK ones (apart from the ones you can't grow in the open) are

*we don't find *R. ponticum* the pest you do, but we have blackberry, ragwort, ivy, holly, union weed, oxalis and sycamore maple inherited from you that are noxious weeds here (but not yet Cornish *phytophthora* fortunately).

*we get best value from early to mid flowering varieties and you do better with mid and late ones.

You get frost. We get pre-Christmas heat which, if coupled with wind, spoils *R. maddenii* and even *R. nuttallii*.

Google and Picasa are great! Thanks to Chris Callard and Pam Hayward (both ARSV and RHS members) for introducing me to Picasa. I use Picasa and now Picasaweb. I have just set up the latter for ARSV.

I keep ARSV photo archive. I have a few photos on

<http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVicARSNRGSeptember2006>

Simon Begg (simonwbegg@gmail.com)

Letter from Norway

I grow rhododendrons on the S.W. coast of Norway which has a good climate for many species and hybrids, being both mild and wet but with rather colder winters.

However I am writing to say that the Norwegian Camellia Society has just seen the light of day! Camellias have been relatively unknown in Norway, limited to a few hardy outdoor plants in microclimates on the west coast. Thanks to a very enthusiastic lady, Eli Margrete Stølsvik, the society has been formed.

Eli has introduced and distributed both cuttings and seeds of oleifera type hybrids to botanic gardens and private growers in the Stavanger and Bergen areas. William Ackermann has been instrumental in providing plant material and professional knowledge.

We hope to translate his book "Growing Camellias in a Cold Climate" into Norwegian as little literature exists. We look forward to being able in the near future to e-mail news and photos of a camellia-covered Norway! A little help from global-warming and the new cold hardy hybrids will hopefully make the ambition of our newly started society a reality

Robert Porter, Secretary

Letter from Sweden

Dear Miranda,

In response to your note for overseas members, I do have something which might be of interest for 2007 from my adopted Sweden. (I moved here many moons ago from the Scottish Borders, chasing a young Swedish lady!).

The most important woodland garden in this part of the world, without doubt, is Sofiero, situated just outside the city of Helsingborg.

The present King of Sweden's grandfather was given the house as a wedding present upon his marriage to Margaret of Connaught in 1905. Coming from Bagshot, Margaret inspired her crown prince to try out a couple of rhododendrons in the ravine in front of the house and these first plants (which came from Bagshot!) were planted in 1907.

The gentleman was thereafter, like most of us, hooked and his interest flourished until his death in 1973. He left a beautiful garden with around 5000 rhododendron plants, 350 different, to the city of Helsingborg. Since then the number of plants has been doubled!

Perhaps, if it could be of interest, I could prepare a *short note on this for the Bulletin and a more comprehensive article for the Yearbook of 2008. I can then send along a selection of digital photographs from the garden taken in the Spring of 2007.

Let me know if that would be of interest,

Alan Duncanson.

(* Yes, please.....Hon. Bulletin Ed.)

Letter from Tasmania

Dear Miranda,

I have just read your letter in The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group July Bulletin requesting correspondence from overseas members and even though I am a very new member I thought I would write and tell you about a camellia that I have only had for about twelve months; it has flowered for six of those months. I live in Kingston, an outer suburb to the south of Hobart, which is the capital of the state of Tasmania which is the little island south of mainland Australia. There is nothing but ocean between us and Antarctica and when the wind blows from the south as it is today it can be very cold.

I have a very new garden having only been here in a new house for eighteen months although I am not a new gardener I have always grown heritage roses, rhododendrons and camellias and have now got the same in my new garden. The camellia I wish to tell you about is 'Takanini'; it is a hybrid, has small to medium sized flowers of carmine to deep purplish red, semi-double with anemone centre. My bush is only small, about one metre tall and has just flowered and flowered. I am not sure if you can get this variety in the U.K. but if you can it is well worth growing.

Most of Australia is also suffering from drought and this is bad when it happens in winter, parts of Tasmania have some drought but I think we are the best off in Australia.

Diana Ward.

The Bulletin is a medium for two-way communication and we welcome letters of wide general interest, as well as those on specific issues. More letters in the next issue. Hon. Editor.

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BRANCH REPORTS

South West Branch

Alun Edwards

My apologies for not printing this report from the South West Branch, but the Report of your Show crowded the report in to this issue. Hon. Ed.

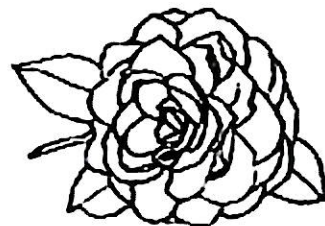
June 2006

April 22/23. We held a Flower Show at RHS Rosemoor. 15 entrants produced 123 blooms, trusses and sprays of all three genera. Dick Fulcher judged the rhododendrons and Malcolm Pharoah the camellias and the magnolias. A steady stream of members, visitors and Rosemoor staff passed through and we received complimentary comments. A longer description of the show has been written by Pam Hayward and appeared in the last issue of the Bulletin.

May 13. Some 50+ members and guests came to visit gardens near Buckland Monachorum. First to Lovecombe where Admiral Sir Hugo and Lady Jo White took us round their extensive garden. Jo White has taken advantage of a South facing slope to fill the garden with a great variety of plants. Of note was a fine example of R. 'Sir Charles Lemon'. We presented R. 'W.F.H.' a dark red cross between R. *haematodes* and R. 'Tally Ho'.

Matt Bishop, the new Head Gardener at The Garden House, asked us to put names to rhododendrons with long lost labels. This prompted much discussion and reference to books, an occasion much enjoyed by all.

*Camellias from the purest
white to the richest red.*



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The afternoon was spent at Maristow House, overlooking the river Tavy estuary. Here Jim Scully and Norman Parfitt have cleared the formal garden and planted an avenue of magnolia leading to a restored fountain. In the less formal garden they have planted many examples of the three genera. We presented a plant of *Davidia involucrata*.

May 25. We visited Sir John and Lady Prue Quicke's magnificent garden at Sherwood, Newton St. Cyres. The main purpose of the visit was to see the National Collection of Knaphill azaleas. What a splendid palette of colour; we were spoilt for choice. There is so much to see at Sherwood. Sir John gave us a comprehensive tour. We presented *Magnolia odora*, syn. *Michelia odora* (? *Magnolia odoratissima* or *Tsoongiodendron odorum*, vide. LIU Yu-Hu. *Magnolias of China ... Hon. Ed.*) Any member passing near this garden should visit it. It is open every Sunday from 2 to 5.

October 2006

Some 67 plus members and guests met at RHS Rosemoor on October 21. Dr. George Argent gave a very well received lecture on hunting for *Vireya* rhododendrons on the island of New Guinea. This was a lecture skilfully varied to show botany, horticulture and anthropology.

The plant sale, with even greater numbers of offerings than usual, was a sell-out.

Pam Hayward organised the Quiz.

First prizes went to Barry Starling and Terry Vince.

Colin Brown was welcomed as the new Branch Chairman.



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MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

All subscriptions become due on 1st November, each year. Those who pay annually by cheque (but NOT by Standing Order) will find a reminder with this Bulletin

Please pay promptly to ensure your Yearbook arrives in Jan/Feb.

We are very pleased to welcome the following new members. We hope they will enjoy their membership.

UK

Mr P.G.K. Barnes, (NW)
Penllwyn, Brongest, Newcastle Emlyn, Cardiganshire, SA38 9ER.
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Mr Ian Bingham,
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Mrs Kathryn W. Johnson,
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Mr D.G. Smith, (NW)
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camforest@aol.com

NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held in June 2007 (date to be confirmed) in the Garden Room, Hillside Centre, R.H.S. Garden Wisley. At 2.00p.m.

Judith Hallett has become our new Tours Organiser. She has organised a very successful first Autumn Weekend in Herefordshire and has also arranged our Spring Tour to Ireland in May 2007 (**Brochure enclosed with this Bulletin**)

Convenor of Group Seed Bank. Sadly Chip Lima has resigned but we are pleased that **Gerald Dixon** of Brooklands Nursery, Shute, Axminster, Devon, EX137QF has agreed to take on this post.

His email is: brooklandrhododendrons@btopenworld.com

Committee Members.

Maurice Foster, Ivor Stokes and Brian Wright will have served their present three-year term on the Committee in 2007.

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 01342 822745 or the Hon. Secretary on 01503 220215 if you require any further details.

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

RHODODENDRONS OF SUBGENUS VIREYA – George Argent 2006

The first full monograph on Vireya rhododendrons.
382pp, illust. Full Price: **£55** Member's Price: **£39**
Postage: UK **£5**, Europe **£8**, Rest of World **£15** (Air)

RHODODENDRONS IN HORTICULTURE & SCIENCE – Eds. Argent and McFarlane 2003

Proceedings of the RBGE Rhodo '02 Conference.
Contributions are diverse and relevant – ask for a list.
312pp, illust. Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£20**
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RHODODENDRONS & AZALEAS – Kenneth Cox

Full Price: **£29.95** Member's Price: **£24.50**

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HARDY RHODODENDRON SPECIES – A Guide to Identification – James Cullen

496pp, illust. Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£23.50**

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International RHODODENDRON REGISTER and CHECKLIST Second Edition – RHS 2004

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

Postage: UK **£7.50**, Europe **£8**, Rest of World **£12** (Air)

THE RHODODENDRON HANDBOOK 1998

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

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

2006

Date/Time	Organiser	Location	Event	Contact
November				
11th	SE Branch	OA Room Ardingly College	Talk by Richard Thornton: 'In the footsteps of George Forrest'	Barry Haseltine 01342 713132
14th	Lakeland Society	Holehird 7.30	Talk by Mike Thornley: 'Assam adventure' plus botanical art display by Anne Chambers	Shelagh Newman 01539 531979
25th	NW & N.Wales	Ness Gardens 2.30	Talk by Ian Sinclair: 'Plant Hunting in the Pacific North West of N. America'	Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
December				
12th	Lakeland Society	Holehird 7.30	Members photographic evening	Shelagh Newman 01539 531979

2007

January				
13th	NW & N.Wales	Ness Gardens 2.30	Talk by Morna Knottenbelt: 'The Rhododendrons of Bidston Hill, Wirral'	Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
23rd	Lakeland Society	Windermere Hydro	Annual Dinner	Shelagh Newman 01539 531979
February				
10th	NW & N.Wales	Ness Gardens 2.30	Alan Clark: 'Plant Hunting in North East India'	Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
14th	Lakeland Society	Holehird	Talk by John Main: 'Plants, Places and People, Yunnan, China'	Shelagh Newman 01539 531979
March				
13th	Lakeland Society	Holehird 9.30 Holehird 7.30	Working Party at Holehird South Wood Talk by Group Chairman, Mike Robinson on Magnolias	Shelagh Newman 01539 53197
April				
4th	RCM Group	RHS, London	Wilson Study Day, 10.00am – 5.00pm	
14th /15th	SE Branch	Borde Hill, Sussex	Branch Show (with ICS)	Barry Haseltine 01342 713132
15th-21st	Lakeland Society	S.E.England	Spring Tour, led by Christopher Bradbury	Shelagh Newman 01539 53197
21st	NW & N.Wales	To be confirmed	Visits to members gardens	Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
22nd/23rd				
May				
5th	Wessex Branch	Richmond Park	Visit to Isabella Plantation	Malcolm Nash 01483 275013
5th /6th	NW & N.Wales	Ness gardens 2.30	Branch Show	Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
8th	Lakeland Society	Holehird 7.00	Branch Show	Shelagh Newman 01539 53197
11th.-14th.	NW & N.Wales	Branch Tour to Northumberland & South East Scotland		Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193
20th	Wessex	Ramster	Branch Show	Malcolm Nash 01483 275013