

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

November 2004

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well the Show Season is in full swing as I write this Report. All is going well with a couple of new faces exhibiting for the first time at the Azalea Show. This is good to see, so come along and join in, it's free entry.

I would like to thank **Carole Quinn** for her effort in organizing the National Congress over the weekend of 16th and 17th October. The whole weekend went off without a hitch, running smoothly. It started with the Friday General Meeting of the Victorian Branch at Nunawading. Saturday commenced at Olinda Gardens with morning tea and a good walk around the Gardens followed by more coffee and cakes just before lunch adjacent to the Gardens. In the afternoon the Congress went to Simon and Marcia Begg's garden for another walk to settle a very large but nice luncheon, before the evening dinner at The Knox Club. Sunday was a great day starting at John & Carole Quinn's garden before walking to Laurie & Joyce Begg's property, where all the goodies were, which kept Laurie on his toes with many purchases of his treasures. Then off to Yarra Burn winery for lunch via the back roads which was enjoyed by all including the bus driver. There to be confronted with a magnificent spit roast which Joan & I unfortunately missed. Apparently this was the highlight of the weekend. What a finish.

This year we put on a display at the ABC. Gardening Expo at Caulfield Racecourse. We entered in "the Societys" category. Our display was manned by Elizabeth Xipell, Fred Coates, Simon & Marcia Begg, Neil Webster and Len Sloggett. Their reports were very encouraging, with great interest from the public. The display promotes the Society's name. For our efforts we received a **Silver Award** from the R.H.S.V. judges, which is no mean feat. Thanks to all who gave the time.

The Bornstein collection is now in the hand of Parks Victoria and most of these have been planted on the main walk adjacent to the Dogwood Lawn, so in a few years they should make a great display all year around.

The next Vireya Group meeting will be Saturday December 11th at 1.30 p.m. at Olinda, to assess these new plantings.

Bill Taylor

THE SPECIES COLUMN

nuttallii, Maddenia series, Dalhousiae Alliance.

nuttallii

Rhododendron nuttallii is one of the most spectacular species. Although regarded as a greenhouse plant in England, it is not difficult to grow in Melbourne or the Dandenongs. The main requirements for cultivation are good drainage, a soil containing plenty of organic matter, and part shade. It can be grown in full sun but the leaves will burn in heat-wave conditions.

Name

After Thomas Nuttall, a botanist and traveller.

Distribution

A fairly wide distribution in Bhutan, N.E. India, Yunnan, and S.E. Tibet. Often grows as an epiphyte on trees, rocks or cliffs.

Number in the N.R.G. Olinda:

A total of 274 plants are listed in the N.R.G. Olinda. Some of these plants have died but there are still hundreds in the Maddenia walk area.

Characteristics:

The main characteristics of this species are the large bullate leaves densely scaly on the underside. The new growth is often purple or brown, later turning green. The trumpet-shaped flowers are some of the largest in the rhododendron genus, up to 13 cm. long, and are white with a yellow throat. All forms have a sweet spicy perfume. [*Mine certainly do. However "The Rhododendron Handbook" RHS 1998 asserts 'not scented' Could this be warmer growing conditions? Ed*]

Different Forms.

The best forms generally have more flowers in the truss, although this can be the result of better growing conditions. Most plants have 3 to 6 flowers, but trusses of 8 to 12 flowers have been recorded. [*"The Rhododendron Handbook op. cit. asserts '2-5 flowers' Ed.*]
"nuttallii var. stellatum" has slightly smaller flowers with a large green calyx.
"Nuttallii var. kallistos" is a good form not recorded by the R.H.S.

and possibly a local name.

Where To See These Plants

See These Plants:

This species usually flowers around Cup Day at Olinda. There are a group near the main gate just past the small gazebo. The main group are at the start of the Maddenia Walk on the right-hand side and extend downhill to the Mathias Road boundary. Some of these are very leggy due to too much shade but there are still plenty of flowers.

Another group of plants just past the lake are mostly nuttallii-lindleyi hybrids. These are just as spectacular as the parent species but are generally earlier flowering and have pointed leaves, compared to the large oval leaves of nuttallii...Some of these have flowers flushed with pink and yellow.

Hybrids.

Very few hybrids of nuttallii have been registered, so there is plenty of scope here for the plant breeder, with the aim of producing low-growing heat-tolerant hybrids with spectacular flowers. Two hybrids are worthy of mention:

Tyermanii (nuttallii x formosum)- A rather sprawling plant with large white trumpet flowers.

Southern Cloud (lindleyi x nuttallii) Hyb. Alf Bramley, Reg. J. Wilson.

A tall plant with huge white flowers and a golden yellow throat.

A.K.

VIREYA SPECIES

R tuba

Vireya Subsection Solenovireya. The subsections are taken from the classification proposed by Dr. H Sleumer in *Flora Malesiana* 1966.

Its name is clearly derived from its flowers' long, curved, tubular corollas.

R tuba is a very special vireya in Melbourne and the Dandenong Ranges. Its natural size is described as 2-5m. In its adopted home it often exceeds 2m and is a magnificent sight covered in layers of white flowers tinged, to varying degrees, with pink, much like a frilly wedding dress. It flowers regularly in the sense it can be depended upon to flower. Although it only flowers once a year, its flowering period at Olinda can extend from May to late November. It is, naturally, a tidy, not leggy, shrub with glossy deep green foliage and paler new growth. It is sweetly scented, though scent seems more noticeable late in the flowering season, perhaps due to warmer weather.

Hilda Crouch, writing in the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society [summer, 1987, Vol 41 No. 3] observes that her 2 plants [Central West Victoria at 1600 feet] flower in alternate years and have grown to 3 feet in 10 years. I suggest that Olinda, though of similar altitude, is more to the plants liking. I acquired my first plant some 10 years ago in a 6 inch pot and planted it in suburban Melbourne. It flowered for the first time in 1996 and I dug it up and moved it to Olinda in January 1997. It has never missed a flowering since and is now about 2 m. Its clones [cuttings] are rapidly catching up.

For the average suburban gardener, in a suitable climate, like Melbourne, it is an ideal plant, easy to propagate and grow, quite fast growing and resistant to pests such as azalea lace bug and rust. One might have to wait 3 years for flowers. But well worth it! A single spray attracted considerable interest at the ARSV stand at the recent ABC Garden show at Caulfield Racecourse.

For those interested in flower shows *R tuba* is a regular winner, not only in the small flowered species section but as exhibit of the night.

One plant in an 8 inch pot visited a garden club as a display, an ARSV general meeting winning best exhibit of the night, won a blue ribbon at another garden club and then a section at the ARSV Azalea Show, all in the space of a couple of weeks. What Asiatic or Azalea would have this stamina or stand the traveling?

Is *R tuba* a species?

A note to Dr. Sleumer's account records that *R tuba* is in many respects intermediate between *R carringtoniae* and *R rhodolucum*, both also known from the Maneau Range, and possibly a local natural hybrid between them.

Dr. George Argent, author of the vireya section of *The Rhododendron Handbook*, RHS 1998, does not mention *R tuba* possibly being a hybrid but describes its similarity to, and distinguishes it from, *R rhodolucum* and *R armitii*.

R rhodolucum is readily available at Olinda but, as yet, not *R carringtoniae* nor *R armitii*.

Distribution

South East New Guinea on the North side of the Summit of Mt. Dayman in the margin of moss forest at 2500- 2750m. Even in New Guinea temperatures at this altitude must be on the cool side at night. Probably this explains *R tuba*'s success as a plant in Olinda.

Number in NRG

There must be hundreds of *R tuba* growing in the ground at NRG, Olinda. There are a number of plants 2 m tall along the creek between the dams. Vireya plantings are not as well recorded as Asiatics so I don't know how many there are altogether. But visitors can hardly miss them!

Where in the Garden to plant *R tuba*

At NRG Olinda many plants are in semi shade. Some are in quite deep shade. Others are in full sun. I have all mine, at Olinda, in at least partial shade. My plants, unexpectedly exposed to sun, do sunburn. May be plants accustomed to sun would tolerate full sun. In Melbourne suburbs semi shade seems indicated. In the last 3 years I have got progressively bolder with vireya plantings as I have realized that very little of my garden suffers frosts that would kill them. I now have one *R tuba* as a specimen shrub in a lawn and others in garden beds.

Hybrids

Our hybridizers don't seem to use *R tuba*. Perhaps our experts will explain why.

SWB

GENERAL MEETINGS – BENCH DISPLAYS

17TH September 2004

All classes of Vireyas and Rhododendrons had entries, with some very nice exhibits. Elizabeth Xipell and Simon Begg had best exhibits of the night with *konori* and *tuba* respectively. Simon has scored

very well with *tuba* this year. Elizabeth has also exhibited consistently with some stunning blooms.

Vireya blooms of note were – Michael Hare's *laetum* and Alan Walker's 'Summer Time'.

The exhibits of Asiatics were varied. Alan's *websterianum*, Simon's *grande*, Gerry Heilmann's 'Seta' and Alan Kepert's *yak x arboretum* were winners. Bill and Gerry displayed *websterianum* and *cubtii ashcombe*.

Azalea's were also in abundance. Elizabeth gained a first with *canescens* in the deciduous species - a first for her in the Azalea section. The other winners were Bill, Alan, Simon and Michael. Bill and Simon both displayed *linearfolium* (the spider azalea) which is not seen around in many places now. This created a great deal of interest at another venue but that is another story.

15th October 2004

As expected a large quantity of material was on show. Winners for vireya classes were shared. Simon Begg again won exhibit of the night with R. *tuba*. Michael Hare showed *laetum* "Coral Flare" and an unknown which claimed a first in the under 4cm hybrid class. Other class winners were Barry Stagoll, Walter Lobbezoo and Bill Taylor with *zoelleri* 'Michael Black', *laetum x lowii* and "Happy Times". Elizabeth Xipell also displayed well with a number of winning places.

Azalea's were well represented, with the deciduous varieties dominating. Alan Kepert and Barry Stagoll won most of the places. Barry's 'Orchid Gem' and 'Louis van Horte' were very good. Alan's *occidentale* and *luteum* in the species, and 'Frills' and 'Marie Claire' in the hybrid deciduous group were all very good. Alan Walker took a first with mauve *schryderii* in the plant section.

One of our guests, Ann Whitney kindly judged the rhododendrons and we thank her for her expertise. This was a most difficult section as there were a large number of entries. Just a few of note – Marina Moodycliff's *davidsonianum*, Mike and Inge Hammer's *serpillifolium*, Murray McAllister's *cinnabarinum*, Jack Morris's *ovatum*, Elizabeth's 'Hon. Jean de Montague', Bill's 'Blue Crown', and Simon's *lindleyi x nuttalli*.

Len Sloggett

RESULTS OF BENCH DISPLAYS FOR 2004

Here are some points resulting from the bench displays this year.

The number of exhibitors in the azalea section was surprisingly low as large quantities were displayed over most of the year.

Simon Begg was the most consistent vireya entrant, Bill Taylor rhododendrons and Alan Walker azaleas.

Winners of exhibitor of the night were –

Simon – 3

John Quinn – 2

Marina, Murray, Elizabeth and Colin – 1 each

The overall point winners for each section were –

Simon – vireyas and rhododendrons

Alan – azaleas

The bench displays are certainly welcome. It is very pleasant to be seated at meetings and view a great sea of blooms each month.

The non-rhododendron entries also draw favourable comment. This is a good addition to the meetings and allows a wider opportunity for all members to display.

Len Sloggett

TUESDAY VOLUNTEER GROUP

The Society members have been very active in the National Rhododendron Garden.

Last year we tidied up the *maddenii* bed where wire grass was threatening many of the plants. This year we have been tidying the 'big leaf' area in the Mountain Ash forest. Both areas have required removal of fallen branches, bark, wire grass and dead branches plus heavy pruning to some plants and reattaching of ID numbers.

There has been a lot of new plantings through the year.

Looking behind the staff car park you will see a group of American hybrids.

Walking down the garden path where the dogwood lawn was you will come to the first rhododendron on the edge of the path on your left, walk up on to the grass, and on the inside of the rhododendrons you will find our New Zealand bed. If you continue walking down, just before the planting of large plants finish, you will find our new Australian hybrid bed.

All these plantings have been recorded with the help of the G.P.S. unit.

We have had some problems with the vireya bed on the golf course bank. A river of water had been flowing through the bed. We found that a pit that collected the water and directed it to a drain along the top of the bank was full of rubbish. Our excellent team set to work and fixed it.

Now the potting on has started. So come along and join the team and have some fun. Hope to see you in the gardens soon.

Alan Walker

GENERAL MEETINGS

September 2004

The September meeting was filled with a great presentation from Andrew Raper. Andrew needs no introduction to most of us, he is a great helper to our Society in deeds and words.

He started by writing a couple of big names on the whiteboard – STETHOCONUS JAPONICUS and ANAGRUS TAKEYANUS!

I was not sure at this stage whether I was at the right meeting!

Andrew then asked the members to 'brainstorm' their opinions for the diminishing popularity of the genus Rhododendron among plant buying members of the public.

- Smaller garden sizes

- Water restrictions
- Both spouses working
- Competing leisure activities
- Petal blight
- Azalea lacewing

Andrew then asked members to assign 'blame' in order of importance. He then asserted that Azalea Lacewing was number 1 with 80% blame. Due to it, he said, most nurseries no longer stocked Asiatics. Bunnings sold 8 inch pots for \$10 each. Fewer wholesalers now grew Rhododendrons. 9 out of 10 azaleas never left the pot in which they were bought. In effect they were just like cut flowers [or tulips]. Thrown away after flowering. Andrew held ongoing hope for vireyas.

Andrew then explained that *Stethoconus Japonicus* is a natural predator bug of Azalea Lacewing and *Anagrus Takeyanus* is an egg parasitoid of Azalea Lacewing.

Andrew especially referred to *STETHOCONUS JAPONICUS*, which as its name suggests, originated in Japan, like the Azaleas on which Lacewing preys. It is a predatory bug that devours Azalea Lacewing insects. In Japan bug and lacewing are in balance. Each bug is said to devour 6 lacewing per day. As lacewing numbers build up so do the bug numbers.

Azalea Lacewing was introduced into Australia USA and Europe by, at least, the early 1980s but without its natural enemies. In 1985 the bug was 'accidentally' introduced into the USA. There, Andrew said, Azalea Lacewing is no longer such a problem. [*Enquiry to Steve Hootman, co-executive director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, Seattle, and of Fred Whitney, Past President of RSF, reveal that Azalea Lacewing is sufficient of a problem still to require present day consideration of control by spraying. Ed.*] In Australia it is not a problem in Tasmania, nor South Australia. Andrew suggested isolation and lower temperature for Tasmania and low Rhododendron populations for South Australia. But the definitive research is still ahead.

Trials are presently underway in parts of U.S.A. which is most exciting. However with our tight quarantine controls this predatory insect would only be allowed into Australia, if at all, following proper testing. Andrew was adamant that we need to keep a close watch on U.S.A. trials. The Lacewing problem is so large in Victoria that Azaleas and Rhododendrons may disappear from private gardens within ten years unless, he suggested, the Society took action. This is not a very long window of opportunity.

The challenge to us from Andrew is for the Society to become very active with growers, nurserymen, botanists, horticultural schools, university plant researchers and any other interested groups and individuals to participate and provide collective funds for research into Lacewing eradication, in particular, he suggested, testing of the bug. A government subsidy might be available if the Society could organise the seed capital. Andrew thought the required amount may be as little as \$10,000 .

[*Readers should also refer to an article "New ways to control azalea lace bugs" by David Crawford in "the Rhododendron" 2004 Volume 44 page 37.*]

Andrew also suggested that the Society should be more proactive in trying to influence varieties sold to the public. Resistant varieties. [*in "The Rhododendron" 2004 Volume 44 page 33 Alan Kepert discusses the Maddenia series and advocates their resistance Ed.*] Andrew thought the Society might raise with growers the possibility of a Society tick of approval to plants that were disease and pest resistant. He thought, also, that registration of new hybrids should be subject to a more stringent process, including provision of 5 plants to the registrar. Andrew said that the tick of approval and a more stringent registration process were initiatives of the Camellia Society. Andrew is a Vice President of Camellias Victoria Inc.

Andrew was most stimulating and provocative. Great – thankyou Andrew.

P.S. There was not enough time to look seriously at petal blight, which is a huge problem for us home gardeners. Our spraying capabilities are unlikely to be effective.

Len Sloggett

October 2004

The October General Meeting was part of the 2004 Australian Rhododendron Society Convention. We thus benefited from having visitors from South Australia, Tasmania and USA attend. We were very pleased to welcome them. Our Guest speaker for the evening was Fred Whitney, past President of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, Seattle. Fred and his wife Ann Whitney both helped judge the bench displays. They had a difficult task as, being peak season, there were many entries. We are grateful for their help.

2004 AZALEA SHOW

Thanks particularly to the Tuesday volunteer group, and with the additional expertise of people like Len Sloggett and others, the Azalea Show again presented an excellent display to the public.

President Bill Taylor worked full-time for the Society for the week prior to the Show, not only in preparing for it, but also in preparation for the **ABC Gardening Australia Show** at the Caulfield Racecourse on the same weekend. What an amazing effort on his part! To top it off his display at Caulfield took top honours for its presentation. The public were very interested in the display of rhododendrons, vireyas and azaleas and asked many questions about pests, diseases and growing conditions. Extreme interest was shown in Azalea *linearifolium* (the Spider Azalea) and enquiries re its availability were many. The second most admired plant was *Vireya tuba*.

Congratulations to all who assisted at either show, they were both excellent promotions of the work of the Society.

Principal Award Winners at the Show

President's Award: Brian Clancy for 'Bangkok Beauty'

Society Award: Alan Kepert for '*luteum* x Gibraltar'

Children's Award: Sarah Foster

ARCS Trophy: Jack Morris

Best Bloom: John Quinn for 'Van ness Sensation'

The highlight of the show though, was the continued high quality of exhibits placed by the two 'Grand Masters', Karl van de Ven and Brian Clancy.

MMcA based on a report by Frank Ahern.

Vireyaholics will be interested to hear that the web site of Sharon Costin is now operating. It includes a fairly comprehensive presentation of photographs of hybrids, to assist in making choices. Vireyas can also be sourced by colour. Check it out at: www.vireyasonline.com.au

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In the September 2004 Newsletter, Colin Livingston's best bloom of the July meeting was described as *zoelleri x christiana x konori x gardenia*. Despite the excitement of the members present, this is the only description given to the majority of readers of the newsletter who were unable to attend the meeting.

Without any doubt, *R. gardenia* is not in cultivation in Australia. It was originally collected in Western New Guinea (now Irian Jaya) by botanist Schlechter in 1918 and described as a 'high epiphyte in forest and as a terrestrial shrub in sandy openings in Western New Guinea, Sepik River region and Bele River Valley 25 km NE of Lake Habbema'. *R. gardenia* has 3-4 funnel shaped flowers in the truss and the flowers are similar to *konori*, *superbum* and *phaeopeplum*.

The correct parentage of the prize winning bloom is : [*R. zoelleri x (R. christiana x R. konori)*] x 'Gardenia Odyssey'. Therefore, it is enlightening to notice that 50% of the cross is the outstanding 'Gardenia Odyssey', and from this one can deduce that 50% of the hybrid seedlings will have multi-flowered trusses.

'Gardenia Odyssey' was received as *R. gardenia* by the late Bill Mearns in 1973 together with a pink form of *R. leucogigas* from Welensky a forester in Irian Jaya. The plant of *R. leucogigas* died after flowering in a beautiful pink form, its demise, in my opinion, due to being a vigorous grower in a root-bound pot. 'Gardenia Odyssey' is a vigorous terrestrial plant that quickly becomes root-bound in a pot and is best grown in the ground.

Bill Mearns first flowered the 'so called *R. gardenia*' in 1981. the same year he delivered 12 large plants propagated from the original 'so called *R. gardenia*' to the Vic. Branch. The first flower of this consignment was exhibited and awarded 'best on the night' at the May 1986 monthly meeting at Nunawading. It was obvious to that this truss of 26 creamy-yellow flowers indicated 5-star potential but no pollen was available as the flower was to be photographed the following day. The photograph of this exhibit is contained in Volume 33 of *The Rhododendron* and in 'Rhododendrons and Azaleas' by Graham Price. The 26-flower truss bore no resemblance to *R. gardenia* and the 5 and 6 petals on the flowers of the truss are a sure sign of hybridity.

Due to the efforts of the Branch President, Graham Price, one year old plants of the 'so-called *R. gardenia*' were made available at \$10 each, one to each member of the Vic Branch who attended the 'garage sale' in Feb 1988. from this distribution John O'Hara was the first member to flower and exhibit the 'so-called *R. gardenia*' at the November 1990 meeting at Nunawading. Notwithstanding that the benches were overflowing with the peak exhibition of all rhododendrons, John's 'so-called *R. gardenia*' with 23 creamy-yellow flowers and a lovely scent was clearly awarded 'best of night'.

In *The Rhododendron* 1993, Lyn Craven, in his article 'Bringing a conclusion to confusion: *R. Gardenia Odyssey*', determined that Bill Mearns's 'so-called *R. gardenia*' was neither *R. gardenia* Schlechter or a species, and that the plant is of hybrid origin. Then to eliminate any doubt, he correctly registered the name 'Gardenia Odyssey' to reflect the nomenclature journey on which the plant had been. He then cautiously stated that the plant was 'apparently' introduced to Australia from the Netherlands, this is not correct. There is no doubt whatsoever that the plant originated from Welensky, a forester in Irian Jaya in 1973. As Lyn Craven would know, collectors utilise the local

experience of others in the area that they are botanising, and who better to consult than a forester in the area. Before ignoring the year 1973, it is significant that the world authority on vireyas, Dr. H. Sleumer, noted in *Blumea* 21 (1973) 357-376, that *R. gardenia* Schlr was collected on 18th March 1973 by Sauver and Sinke East of Bailem R. valley and East Western Sepik District, Telefomin, Oksapmin, 1585m, in mixed forest with Fagaceae and Araucaria, fr., NGF 41542. Surely it would be possible for those involved to check whether Welensky was consulted.

‘Gardenia Odyssey’ is one of the most outstanding vireya introductions from the wild in the past thirty years, notwithstanding it is of hybrid origin. Mature plants produce fabulous spectacular trusses of up to 29 creamy yellow, scented flowers every 2 to 3 weeks for 3 to 4 months. It is best grown in the ground and is most spectacular in the garden. It should be in the garden of every vireya grower.

Brian Clancy
Bentleigh

[The Editor, as always, is overjoyed to receive correspondence. Especially from such a distinguished expert as Brian Clancy. Readers should note that a magnificent truss of ‘Gardenia Odyssey’ won for Brian plant of the Show at the 2004 Rhododendron Show held over Melbourne Cup weekend. I did not count the florets. Ed.]

FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday, 19 November: Annual General Meeting—Nunawading **8.00 p.m.**

Topic: Ron Moodycliffe

Saturday, 4th December: Christmas Lunch – Barachi (formerly ‘Bideawhile’) Restaurant

Saturday, 11 December: Vireya Group Meeting--- NRG, Olinda **1.30 p.m.**

Topic: the Bornstein collection

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