

## THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

January 2014

Published by the  
Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)  
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**HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THE LATEST NEWS ON THE ARS WEBSITE?**

**[www.rhododendron.com.au](http://www.rhododendron.com.au)**

**FACEBOOK:** Do you have some interesting garden photos, information about your garden, visits or tours, etc., you have done, which may be of interest to other members? You are invited to send them to Prue Crome via email and she will put them on Facebook and/or the ARSV website. Email [prue.crome@fcpl.net.au](mailto:prue.crome@fcpl.net.au)

### **2014 PROGRAMME**

#### **MARCH**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>** : Plant Collector's Sale and Garden Expo at Ferny Creek Horticultural Society, Hilton Rd Ferny Creek. 10am-4.30pm

#### **APRIL**

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>** : **Tesselaars Gardening and Plant Expo. 357 Monbulk Rd Silvan.** 9.00am-4.00pm.

The ARSV will hold a plant stall at this big event. Plants for sale have been grown at the NRG and will include some rare and unusual species and hybrids. Bargains also. Help on the stall from members would be appreciated. Please ring Prue Crome PH: 9489 8094 or Email: [prue.crome@fcpl.net.au](mailto:prue.crome@fcpl.net.au)

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>** : Autumn Show at Ferny Creek. ARS members are encouraged to enter rhododendrons from all groups. A schedule will be available on the Ferny Creek Horticulture Society website.



## **PRESIDENTS REPORT JANUARY 2014**

Dear members,

I am writing this report after our week or so of ridiculously hot weather. I have apologized to our editor for not getting this report to him earlier, but the only chance I have had to write it has been in the evenings and our upstairs west facing office was not less than 32C for the week. So sitting in front of the computer just wasn't something I wanted to do. I have had lots of 5am starts so that I could get to Rockbank to water what is left of my conifer collection before work. I have found both there and at home, where I have a number of Rhodies in pots, that the plants that burnt the most were those that were already suffering from water stress. This is of course not always the case as plants all have their own upper temperature limit and temperatures in the mid 40s is too much for some. I will add that I have a few succulents that are not looking too good. I do hope you and your plants are surviving.

Since our last Newsletter we have, as mentioned in that edition, had Steve Hootman from the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden in the USA come and stay in Melbourne. This was part of a tour of SA, Tas and Vic where he gave a talk in each state. We were very pleased that he could come to Melbourne and, while here, he toured Olinda and a few other gardens (he was very impressed with the National Rhododendron Garden). He also gave a very entertaining and interesting talk, which was well attended, at Domain House near the Botanic Gardens. I hope that this is just the first of the occasional talks we will organise and present for a more general audience when speakers are available. An unfortunate aside to Steve's visit, is that the excellent garden of Neil and Wendy Marriott that he, Prue Crome and I visited as we travelled from Adelaide to Melbourne, in the Black Range near Stawell was in an area burnt out this week. This garden had been completely destroyed by fire in 2006. I do not at this time know what damage the garden suffered this time.

I have not been to the Garden at Olinda since Tuesday, but reports from Glenn are that the Vireya House was coping well with the heat. The misting system is maintaining the humidity and keeping the temperature down to about outside ambient or sometimes even a bit lower.

Certainly the early evidence is that the plants are doing very well. Anyone who remembers what the glasshouse was like before the renovation knows that this is a big improvement.

Laurie, Alex and others have been working away diligently filling the propagation house with cuttings from all sorts of highly desirable Rhododendrons both species and cultivars. There is still room for more material in the propagation house and members are always welcome to use the facility. The nursery material grown over the last couple of years is now getting to a size where we will start moving it on. So there are plenty of plants that should interest members.

The Vireya House refurbishment has necessitated the building of other facilities to replace things lost because of the change of use of the glasshouse. The first was the Propagation house; this is now working well and a great improvement. Some changes were also made to the nursery. The final building task, the potting shed, is now well underway. This facility will allow the volunteers to work in relative comfort out of the weather and give us somewhere to store pots, mixes and equipment. It will also contain a "ROUSE HOUSE" or an artificial environment for raising seedlings. This will again be open for members who wish to raise their own seedlings but don't have their own facilities.

The Park Victoria management at Olinda and the ARS (VB) are working towards an informal agreement expressing our mutual commitment to the National Rhododendron Garden. This agreement outlines the roles of both Parks and the ARS. It outlines facilities and access and emphasises the ongoing role of the ARS to contribute expertise and have an ongoing role in the Gardens development. This includes the ARS being involved in bimonthly Garden Management meetings where the needs and plans for the Garden are discussed. This will provide the Tuesday's volunteers with a more formal input to the ongoing development of the garden and allow the development of longer-term work plans.

**John O'Hara**

### **NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT JANUARY 2014**

To say the summer conditions this year have been pretty horrific is probably unnecessary however I will say that there have been some surprises.

As a consequence of South Australian Fire danger Ratings having, within the statements accompanying them, the statements that people may or will die during fires at the severe Extreme and Catastrophic levels and the ramping up of Workplace health and safety legislated penalties for placing employees at risk, Mt Lofty Botanic Garden now closes whenever the rating reaches Severe or above within the Mt Lofty Ranges Fire Region. To counter the fact no staff would be present during these periods there has been a considerable investment in Automation of irrigation at MLBG.

Last week MLBG was closed every weekday as well as Saturday. After six days of no staff being present it was quite encouraging to see how little damage the Rhododendron collection suffered.

This does support the argument that good preparation and use of technology can be of great assistance. Here at home where I was able to monitor and irrigate usually twice but at least

once a day my plants suffered more than in the Lofty garden. As is often the case location does play a big role but selection of plants is also a key. There are Rhodies in my garden in full sun with no burn and yet there are some in quite sheltered spots that have been badly burnt or heat affected.

I would like people from all branches to take note this summer and if possible to provide the observations of what is being called the hottest year in recorded history to be published in the Journal. I would be happy for these to come to me via email and I will try to pull it together as an article.

The Journal has been completed for this last year and I apologise for the delay in its production however it will be there for those that ordered in hard copy soon and on line in PDF on the National website for those who chose that method.

I encourage all members to keep growing their Rhodies and look forward to the observations coming my way.

Regards

**Rob Hatcher**

### **SURVIVING THE HEATWAVE OR NOT**

From January 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 2014 Melbourne had 4 consecutive days over 41C. This is a record, though in 1908 there were 5 consecutive days over 40C, 4 of which were over 41C. The maximum on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2014 was 44C or 111F.

Last year Marcia and I lived at “Beechmont” in Olinda where the maximum temperature is usually 5C lower than in Melbourne. So I assume the Olinda maxima were high 30s C. Still unpleasantly hot for rhododendrons and many other plants.

Back in 2009, there were even hotter days, culminating with Black Saturday February 7<sup>th</sup>. The Melbourne temperature reached 46.4 C or 115.5F. This was the hottest temperature ever recorded in an Australian Capital City. At “Beechmont” we measured 42C. We found at “Beechmont”, that many plants got burned. All exposed rhodos, maples and nothofagus but not fuchsia, daphne, magnolia or camellia. We did not lose many plants because we had available water and used it liberally. There was a similar story at NRG. But, there, lack of watering made a bad situation far worse. A fair estimate, at the time, was that 40% of vireya species in the vireya species bed did not survive. The miracle rather was that so many did survive.

This year at Montrose, just below Mt Dandenong, we certainly had 4 days over 40C. Perhaps 1C lower than the city. For two days all was well. On the third burning started. By the 4<sup>th</sup> day large numbers of plants exposed to sun for even short periods got substantially burnt.

Rhododendrons, including vireyas, maples, camellias and hydrangeas were all burnt but not magnolias, fuchsias nor gardenias. The worst burnt is an established maple planted in lawn that has been watered twice a day for 15 minutes a time during the heatwave. I think it will survive. Almost all of our rhodos are vireyas. Some did far better than others. Some will not



survive. These were ‘delicate’ or exposed to direct sun. Fortunately not very many vireyas were so exposed.

We have benches with vireya species in pots that are largely shaded. There we lost a few delicate species; *burtii* and *stevensianum* and odd plants where others of the same species were fine. Particularly pleasing, all 41 *milleri* seedlings are fine. The benches survived the winter with very minor cold damage. Taken all round these benches will survive anything, we think, given watering. Even Chatham Island Forget Me Nots planted in our creek got through the week alive. Also pleasing our creek is still running. It is fed by a spring under a neighbour’s house and disappears down a stormwater drain just before our West boundary. It now runs our watering system without help from Yarra Valley Water and whatever run off there is goes back into said stormwater drain. A very useful resource! At least until the spring dries up. We have green lawns that I have to mow twice a week!

I went back to “Beechmont” to see how it was faring. The answer was very much better than in 2009. A couple of degrees cooler plus a 5 year more established garden. There were some dry lawns because of difficulty the new owners had running the watering system. Hopefully now corrected. But the plants had only minor burning. Many vireyas were flowering happily. *laetum*, *lochiae*, *viriosum*, *radians*, and dozens of hybrids. Among them “Buttermilk”, “Great Scentsation” and *lochiae x herzogii* that won Ferny Creek’s Blue Ribbon last weekend before the heat. The Beechmont problem is a different one. Everything is growing too well. A huge pruning and thinning effort is required. Which, of course, is why Marcia and I decided we should leave a year ago.

On to National Rhododendron Garden. To me it seemed the Vireya House was living up to John and Andrew’s design. Everything happy save an *orbiculatum* that was sick before it arrived there. I noticed *acrophilum* among the species in flower. If the Vireya house can cope with last week it can cope with anything. The propagation area was also fine. It is a tribute to Alex’s efforts. Outside her domain a few species in the tunnel were dying from lack of water. Outside the Vireya House and Alex’s domain I only looked at the area in the immediate vicinity. Burning was evident but not universally fatal. The combination of burning and lack of water was very serious. Sadly for me all the species that I donated to NRG from Beechmont, fearing that they faced an uncertain future at Montrose, are dead or seriously distressed. *bryophyllum* and *dielsianum* [Michael Black collection] ex Lyn Craven vanished without a trace some time ago. I fear for the yellow form of *rarilepidotum* and *hellwigii*. *konori* was stressed but salvageable. I could not find *rutteni*. I did what watering I had time for and Walter Lobbezoo was going to water properly. Fortunately I have cuttings of all these growing. Walter told me that there is a lot of damage throughout the rest of the Garden.

I trust this damage is not as severe as in 2009 because NRG has a new watering system [where it is used] and there has been a vastly improved maintenance effort in the intervening 5 years

**Simon Begg**

## THE SPECIES COLUMN.

*prinophyllum* -Subsection Pentanthera.

Rhododendron *prinophyllum* is one of the American deciduous azaleas and was formerly known as *roseum*. This is quite a showy plant and does well in the rock garden at Olinda. It can be grown in Melbourne, but obviously prefers a colder and wetter climate. This species, together with the other American Pentanthera group, was used in hybridising the Knaphill and Exbury azaleas in England. Frederick Street gives an interesting account of the development of these hybrids in his book “*Azaleas*”(1959).

### **Name:**

The name means leaves like a prinos. It is commonly called the “roseshell azalea” in America.

### **Distribution:**

A widely scattered distribution, from Oklahoma, Arkansas, to Virginia, at 150 to 1500 metres. Found in mountains, thickets, open woods and sphagnum bogs.

### **Characteristics:**

This species forms a bushy shrub up to 3 metres high, with bristly stems. The leaves are up to 8 cm. long with bristly margins. The flowers are 4 cm. across, deep to rose-pink with a spicy clove-like scent. Its nearest relative is *periclymenoides*, usually a paler pink with glabrous (smooth) buds. Due to indiscriminate pollination by bees, it often hybridises with *canescens* and *periclymenoides*, resulting in extensive hybrid swarms.

### **Where to See this Plant.**

There is one plant of *prinophyllum* in the main rockery which makes a fine show in early November (see photo). It is just off the gravel path towards the North end of the rockery.

### **Related Species:.**

There are 13 American species in the Pentanthera section and we have most of them in the Main Rockery but the numbers are mostly very thin. We really need to propagate them to ensure continuity.

*alabamense* – one plant in the rockery..

*arborescens* – 2 plants found.

*atlanticum* – 4 plants found. Two different forms.

*austrinum* – only one plant found, possibly another in the Maddenia Walk.

*calendulaceum* – 6 plants in the Horseshoe bed. Various colours.

*canescens* – 5 plants, probably the same clone.

*cumberlandense* – one plant in the rockery.

*flammeum* – one plant of the red form.

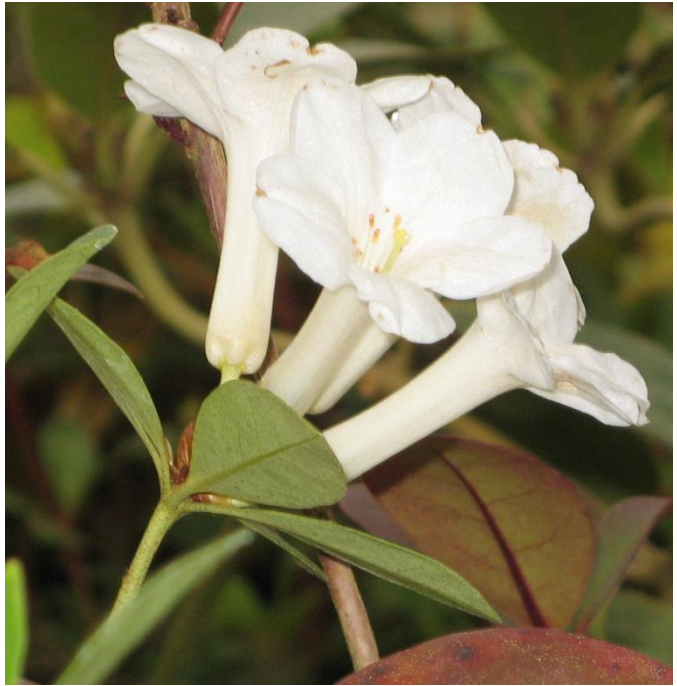
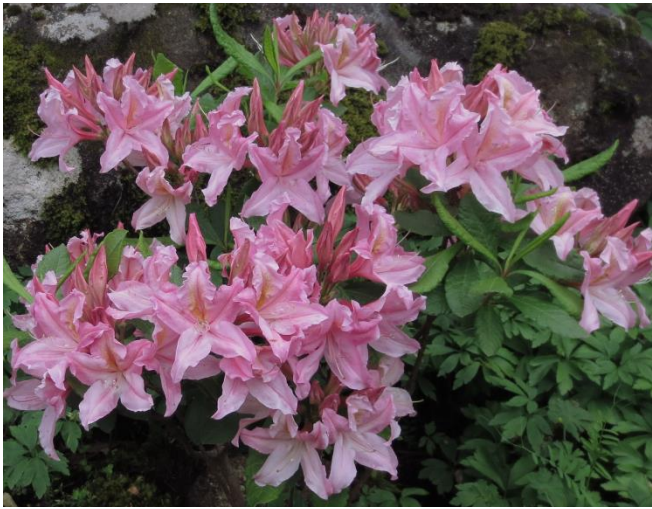
*occidentale* – About a dozen plants. A hardy species from California.

*prunifolium* – 3 plants found. A late flowering red.

*viscosum* – only one plant. “The swamp Honeysuckle”.

**Alan Kepert.**





*R prinophyllum*  
Alan Kepert photo November 2012

*R luraluense* in Lyn Craven's  
glasshouse, Canberra August 2006



*R acrophilum* in flower in the Vireya House, NRG, after the heatwave





**Propagation Shadehouse, NRG, after the heatwave**



**Propagation Fogger, NRG, after the heatwave**





**New Potting Shed, NRG, construction by John O'Hara and Michael Hare**



**Vireya House, NRG, after the heatwave**





**'Gardenia Odyssey' at Montrose after the heat. Note the yellow flower!**



***R hellwigii* and *R brassii* burnt in the heatwave at Montrose. More shade needed!**



## **THE GARDEN RAMBLE**

Visitation to the National Rhododendron Garden continues to grow this year with a continuing 20% growth in visitation. If this continues it will mean a total of 120,000 people for this financial year at current rates of visitation. It is great to see lots of people using the garden and enjoying the beauty.

Who are these visitors you may ask? Recently we spent some time analysing the changes in the gardens and planning for the future. Our traditional visitors, pre free entry, of older retirees is slowly reducing. The big jump in numbers is the Asian market that now makes up about 60% of our visitation. The other big jump is in return visitors, families and locals.

What does this mean for the garden?

Services such as the Garden Explorer are in less demand therefore this will be reduced to keep it commercially viable.

People are looking to picnic and have family gatherings.

We need to find new options for parking as our parking facilities are often overwhelmed.

The opportunities we have to promote Rhododendrons and gardening are increasing to the stage where we are actually finding it hard to find suitable stock to sell. But the gift shop revenue has now outstripped the revenue that we used to receive from entry fees.

The rising Asian market is shown in the blow out of numbers at the Hanami Festival in September which has experienced 'death by success'. 16,000 visitors on one day meant the mountain was in gridlock with traffic queued for kms. While visitors enjoyed the day at the garden the community cannot cope with such numbers with parking nearly impossible. If an emergency were to occur on such a day access by emergency vehicles on the mountain would be impossible. At this stage we will not be putting on a festival but will promote the cherries over a period of time. We hope this will relieve the rush on one particular day.

Horticulturally the year has been pretty good, the wet cool weather has meant an extended flowering season that has extended well into November when normally we are finished early November. The Kurumes did not do well though because it was wet and windy so petal blight ruined the flowers and there was no chance to spray for it. Dan, Wal, Ben, Tex and Fiona, our horticulturists, continue to do battle with weeds and lawns at this time of year and it can take us till late December to feel we are getting under control.

Finally if you have not visited the new Vireya house 'SHAME on you'. Plants are settling well and putting on good growth. There is still some work to fix up the front entry and put in some interpretation. We will monitor over the summer to see if we need to add some more climate control but so far so good.

**Glen Maskell (Team Leader, NRG)**

## **NURSERY AND PROPAGATION REPORT**

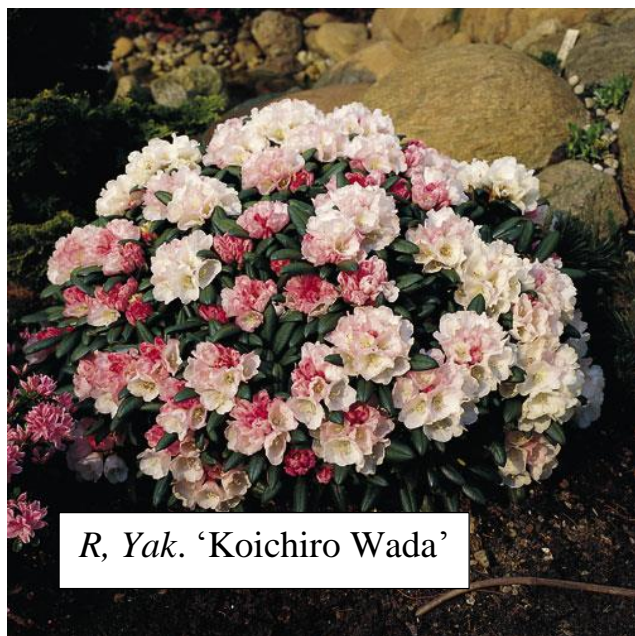
Over the last 3 months we have been propagating species, hybrids, mollis and a few other plants. During the year, the list of plants suggested for propagating grew to 4 pages! We have been shortlisting those deemed to be of importance. Some have been propagated to bulk up current supplies while others were done to replace current stock and some have been done for selling at a later date. We have propagated some *R. macrosepalum* 'Linearifolium' for Melbourne University who are interested in building their species bed. They purchased about 20 species plants from our nursery stock in August.

Prue and I have selected about 40 plants from the nursery for selling at the Tesselaars Rare Plants Sale in April this year. Last year we were able to sell off a collection of Vireyas and Rhododendrons which had been in their pots too long or we had so many of the one that we needed to thin out to make room for new stock coming in.

Laurie and Ian were able to identify relevant plants at Pirianda and, together with Hugh, Arthur and I, we collected cuttings. Together we have managed to propagate Mollis 'Krakatoa' and 'Brazil', 'Dr. Oerstock' and 'Yamina Goldie'. We have done a few Viburnums – 'Carlessii', 'Pink Beauty', 'Macrophyllum', 'Mairisii'. We included Kalmias – 'Fuscata' and 'Carosel'. We also took cuttings of Rhododendron 'Fortune', *augustinii* (very good blue) 'Helen Schiffner', 'Toucan' and  *davidsonianum*.

Some of the rhododendrons from the gardens that have been propagated are 'Glory of Littleworth', *irroratum*, 'Toolangi Ruby', and Laurie has provided a few from his garden.

The potting shed is undergoing a renovation. John O'Hara and Mike have undertaken this construction to enable better shelter and lighting. They have organised a new slab to replace



R, Yak. 'Koichiro Wada'

the old surface of gravel and new frame work for walls and there will be good access to water. The table has been raised with John Pottage extending the legs. This will make potting up more comfortable. We have sourced a new propagation mix through Mike which is easy to use. It won't be long before we have to spend time in the new shed potting up these varieties for the nursery.

**Alex Pottage**

## **JOTTINGS**

**GARDEN MULCH:** A friend of mine recently purchased a new garden tool – a paper shredder!

Every piece of waste paper including junk mail, envelopes, old magazines, out dated documents, newspapers, etc. is put through the paper shredder and added to either the compost bin or put on the garden as mulch. The shredder makes long strips of paper a quarter of an inch wide, not confetti which might blow all over the place. To improve the appearance she buys small amounts of attractive mulch to spread on top. It is easily wetted and breaks down to improve the soil structure.

**RHS UK AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT:** *Rhododendron Yakushimanum* 'Koichiro Wada' was one of four plants to receive this award in May 2013. It was also one of only 10 contenders from the previous 100 years of the Chelsea Flower Show to be in the running to win the Chelsea Plant of the Centenary. Unfortunately it missed out but was very highly praised by the judges. It was described as being 'a small shrub, slow growing and forming a perfect dome in ten years. When flowers appear in spring, foliage is completely masked by pink buds that open to pure white bells. The new foliage that follows is clothed in silver hairs (tomentum), a feature lasting weeks. Leaf undersides are covered with indumentum'.



**BENEFICIAL INSECT LARVAE:** For a few years the ARSV contributed to the purchase of Lacewings to be trialed at the Rhododendron garden in an effort to reduce the impact of the Azalea Lacebug. Lacewing larvae have voracious appetites and eat Lacebugs. They are rather gruesome, as follows – Larvae are up to 12mm (half an inch) long and brownish white. Long, hollow, curved jaws seize aphids, lacebugs and other small insects and suck them dry. Some species have bristles on their bodies among which are placed corpses of earlier meals!

**RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2013:** A new deciduous azalea with scented blooms, blue foliage and late flowering was introduced and released for sale by Millais Nurseries in Surrey, UK. A cross from *Rhododendron viscosum*, ('Swamp Azalea', USA) with *R.* 'Water Girl' it has red buds opening to scented pink blooms above blue foliage. David Millais named it *R.* 'Water Baby'. Is it available in Australia?



**THE AUSTRALIAN PLANTBANK:** The Australian PlantBank is a science and research facility of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust and is located at the **Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan**. It houses the Trust's seedbank and research laboratories that specialise in horticultural research and conservation of Australian native plant species, particularly those from New South Wales. It was opened in October 2013 and is open to visitors on week days. At a cost of around \$20million it is the largest seed bank in the southern hemisphere and one of the largest in the world. Covering three quarters of an acre it will house 200million seeds of Australian and southern Pacific countries plants. A new mobile app invites you behind-the-scenes at the Australian PlantBank in the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan. Explore this exciting new conservation centre, including the laboratories and seed vault, the surrounding landscaped gardens and the nearby endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland.

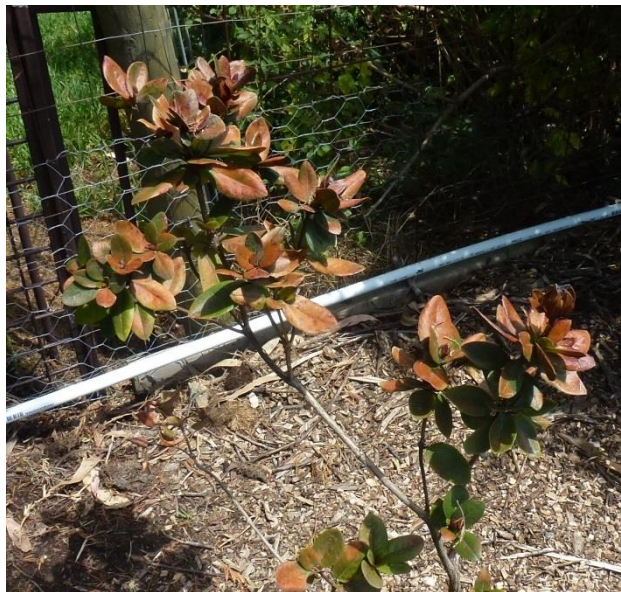
For more information see [www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/annan/plantbank](http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/annan/plantbank)

**WHY DO BUTTERCUPS GLOW?** Scientists and researchers at Cambridge University found the flowers have a highly transparent, glasslike, outer epidermal layer that interacts

with an underlying starchy layer. This causes the petals to reflect ultraviolet light in wavelengths that are visible to many pollinating insects. It has nothing to do with butter! For more information see [www.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cam.ac.uk) and search for 'Buttercup'.

### **ARSV CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

A group of twenty four members and friends enjoyed an excellent two course Christmas dinner at Season's restaurant at Cloudehill. Members had come from as far away as Mt Macedon and Leongatha to catch up with friends. Many of us took the opportunity to walk around the magnificent Cloudehill gardens which were looking lush and brilliant on the beautiful summer's day.



Burnt hybrid at  
Montrose

### **VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN**

*R luraluense* [photo page 7 ]

**Classification** Section *Schistanthe* subsection *Euvireya*. This accords with the classification proposed by Craven *et al* **Vireya Rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification** (*Ericaceae, Rhododendron* section *Schistanthe*) Blumea 56, 2011: 153. The classification proposed by Argent *Rhododendrons in subgenus Vireya* RHS 2006 had *Vireya* as a subgenus and this species in section VII: *Euvireya*-Subsection v: *Euvireya*.



**Source**

Solomon Islands, Bougainville, Lake Luralu 900-1500m

**Name**

Named for the lake around which it was found

**Description**

An epiphytic shrub or small terrestrial tree that translates to an attractive multi-branched shrub in cultivation with attractive funnel shaped white flowers 35-45 x c50mm in 3-6 open umbels. Andrew Rouse frequently won prizes with this species.

### **FERNY CREEK SUMMER SHOW**

The Ferny Creek Summer Show was held on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January. This show began when Mike Hammer was ARSV President as a Vireya and Liliium show with ARSV and Ferny Creek as co-promoters. ARSV quickly dropped out though ARSV members have always provided the bulk of the vireya entries. After 4 years the show has expanded to take in other plants. Hydrangeas in particular. The vireya entries have dropped off to the point that it would not be worth having them at all if I did not provide entries. Sadly Andrew Rouse is on holiday this time of year.

This year I provided for 3 groups of entries.

- Vireyas from “Beechmont’ (under the new owner’s name) where there are lots of vireyas in ground
- ARSV both species from the Vireya house and flowers from around NRG
- My collection at Montrose

Optimistically I thought I could find about 90 entries from these 3 sources. The heat wave was just starting and many blooms I picked on Friday morning had wilted by Friday evening or Saturday morning. Still many made it to judging.

Ian Wallace was the judge and awarded prizes to each of the three groups.

Beechmont won the blue ribbon with *lochiae* [*viriosum*, I suppose] x *herzogii*.

Marcia and I won the large species with *carringtoniae* [labelled as *crutwellii*]. I am not sure at all that *carringtoniae* is right. ARSV had seconds in big and small species. It would have won with *alborugosum* but I did not dare pick the sole flower in the Vireya House.

The result was to keep vireyas on the public map.

ARSV has the opportunity to sell plants at this show. Andrew Raper had Vireyas for sale but the heat was against him.

Next year??

**Simon Begg**

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