



Rhododendron in focus: Rhododendron formosum var inaequale

Subsection Maddenia "Ciliicalyx/johnstoneanum alliance".

If you have trouble growing rhododendron species in Melbourne you should try the Maddenia Series. R. f. inaequale is heat-tolerant, lace-bug resistant, petal-blight resistant, and has the strongest perfume in the Maddenia Series. My plant is growing on the south side of the house on a raised bed in mostly clay loam and gets afternoon shade but plenty of overhead light. This plant is over 40 years old and is covered in perfumed white flowers every year in September. (See Photo) In the same bed are three other Maddenias, namely burmanicum, veitchianum, and cubittii Ashcombe.

Distribution: N.E.India at 600-1800 metres (2000-6000 ft.) growing in open forests or riverbanks.

Characteristics: This species had been split into three varieties, namely : var. formosum, var. iteophyllum and var. inaequale. Var. formosum, has narrow bristly leaves up to 1.5 cm. wide and the flowers are generally small for a Maddenia series, 4 - 7 cm. long, usually white flushed pink with a yellow blotch. Variety iteophyllum is now included in variety formosum. R. f. var. inaequale has leaves 1.5 - 5 cm. long, with larger scented flowers and looks quite different. The Maddenia group as a whole covers a wide area in nature with the result that it is difficult to separate the different forms into species, varieties, and natural hybrids. Botanists are facing a difficult task in laying down an orderly and logical classification when nature refuses to follow any rules.

Where to See These Plants: our GPS survey shows a total of 8 v. formosum and 3 v. iteophyllum, mainly growing in the centre of the Maddenia Walk. They can be seen in flower in late September to early October.

Alan Kepert



R. formosum var inaequale (Photo Alan Kepert)

29/09/2015



R. maddenii in situ on the Cang Shan – a feature of an upcoming Yunnan tour (p. 4) (Photo Ben Wallace)

Another new species

A new species of the Maddenia section has been described from Arunachal Pradesh in northern India. Rhododendron pseudomaddenii A.A.Mao & M.Bhaumik was discovered by two Indian botanists when plant hunting the Tale valley in the lower Subansiri district in 2009 and subsequently in 2011 in West Siang district. It was published this year in the Edinburgh Journal of Botany. It is a small shrub up to 1.5 m tall growing epiphytically, on rocks or in the ground in "semi dense" forest at 1900 – 3000 m. It differs from R. maddenii in having a solitary pink white flower and lacks a groove in the petiole.

The reference is Mao, A. A. and Bhaumik, M. 2015. Rhododendron pseudomaddenii (Ericaceae), a new species from India. Edinburgh Journal of Botany 72(2): 209-213.

Committee 2016

The 2015 AGM was held at the National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda, on 7 November 2015. The only changes to the committee were that Andrew Rouse became Vice-President and Walter Lobbezoo volunteered to be librarian. All other committee members remain on the committee.

Table with 8 columns: Name, Role, Email, Phone 1, Name, Role, Email, Phone 2. Lists committee members for 2016 including John O'Hara, Andrew Rouse, Michael Hare, Prue Crome, Graham Price, Simon Begg, Francis Crome, Dan Macleod, Alex Pottage, and Walter Lobbezoo.

VALE DON DOSSER 1935 – 2016



It is my sad duty to inform members of the passing of yet another of our fine hybridizers.

Don, one of seven children, was born in 'Kelly Country', in North Eastern Victoria in November 1935. His mother, a florist for forty years, instilled a love of flowers in Don and he left his work in a joinery factory and decided to work in the nursery industry. It was whilst working for Karel Van De Ven at his nursery in Olinda that his skills in propagation and grafting, especially with rhododendrons were developed. The thrill of producing a new cultivar, however, changed his life and this was to continue until he became too frail to continue.

He bought an acre of land in East Warburton, built himself a house and established a garden and nursery. However his once quiet retreat became an area popular

with tourists and the fringes of the town expanded and surrounded him. It was then he decided to leave his beautiful garden and crossed Bass Strait with two container loads of plants to find some land where he could live peacefully, make a garden and work on developing more on the cultivation of his beloved rhododendrons and maples. So it was that a weed infested, steep block of land was pointed out to him. Don could see the great potential of this site with its great soil, abundant rainfall and a running stream with a waterfall. Lockington in the North West of Tasmania was born.

I first met Don when my late husband, Graeme, became the registrar and we visited him to write up some new cultivars for registering. Of course before getting down to filling in the paperwork was a stroll around the garden. The colour, the variety and the peaceful surrounds certainly made for a wonderful visit which proved to be the first of many.

Don registered just short of 150 new hybrids. These included both evergreen and deciduous azaleas as well as the Asiatic rhododendrons we all so love. Many were named after family and friends and to look at the leather bound photograph albums brimming with some stunning flowers and listening to the tales behind each new cultivar was a very pleasant way to spend an evening.

There are beds of Don's cultivars up in the gardens at Olinda and also at Emu Valley. It was always Don's dream to have his rhododendrons growing in gardens around Australia. Although there are many who would say some of his cultivars are not show standard I can vouch that most are garden worthy and tough enough to take the harshest conditions.

So let's track down some of Don's favourites, propagate them and let the legacy Don left live on.

Lesley Eaton

Join us in NQ next year

Our native Rhododendron species - *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* - have been introduced into cultivation on a number of occasions, however with the passage of time, the provenance information of many of these introductions has been lost, so we can no longer reliably ascribed a provenance to the specimens in cultivation.

For some years the Society has been planning to address this by re-collecting specimens from the wild and maintaining well-labelled plants in cultivation. Collecting trips are expensive and time consuming, and require permits, so it became clear that for the Society to be successful we'd need to partner with other organisations.

Earlier this year, the Society supported an application from James Cook University to the Ian Potter Foundation, to undertake a conservation research program of the flora of the mountaintops in North Queensland. Part of this program involves surveying montane plant populations on the peaks where *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* occur, and establishing ex-situ collections in cultivation of every mountaintop population. We've recently been informed that the application has been successful! The ARS-Vic Branch is contributing \$5,000, volunteer field helpers, horticultural expertise and our facilities at the NRG Olinda. Simon and Marcia Begg have generously agreed to provide \$10,000 to the project. Plants will be grown on at the NRG Olinda, with the longer-term goal of establishing a dedicated bed where the different provenances of these species can be displayed. These plants can also be a source of fresh material for researchers seeking to undertake analysis into the genetic variability within and between the populations of these species.

The field trips will occur mid-2016 and Society members are invited to provide an expression of interest in participating. Should you be interested in participating, please contact Andrew Rouse, awrouse@bigpond.com or 0424 750 406.

Companion animal – Wattled Ploughbill

High in the mountains of New Guinea between 1300 and 2800 m altitude amongst the tiny *Rhododendron rarum* (bottom left) and the not so tiny *R. englerianum* (right) lives the rarely seen Wattled Ploughbill *Eulacestoma nigropectus* (top left). This strange little bird lives in cloud forest and likes bamboo. It clings to branches chiselling bark with its specially reinforced beak to find insects. The top of the beak has a hard ridge like a chisel and the bottom is upward curved for biting. This one was caught in a fauna survey in the far western highlands. After measuring it was released alive. This bird is a sort of whistler but has its own family the Eulacestomatidae.



Did you know this one?

In the October newsletter we included a photo (below right) of a plant at the NRG that we could not identify. Alan Gillanders may have come up with a solution. He sent us the photo (below left) of "Irene Bain". He wrote:

"We have just seen your recent newsletter of the ARSV, 07 October 2015, and were interested to see that you are calling for identification of the rhododendron on page 2 centre. We suggest that it may be R.'Irene Bain'. We have attached a photo we have of this hybrid. The only difference we can see is in the leaf, which in your picture is longer than in our photo. In the ARS Journal for 2010 Volume 50 my wife Lesley had an article on her painting hobby. The Editor at the time featured the painting of R.'Irene Bain' on the cover. We hope this is of some help if not hindrance.

Kind regards, Ken & Lesley Gillanders"



Upcoming trip to Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan

Society members Ben and Xiaomei Wallace will be running a tour to Western Yunnan next April (2016). Ben's tours may be ideal for many society members as the tour will be in comfort and be led by an experienced botanist who ran many collecting trips to the region (Ben). It will feature the Han culture, especially the fabulous cuisine in its endless variety, with and without oriental spices; the spectacular leap in standard of living and economic development will be there before you! You will experience interaction with half a dozen minority culture peoples – their architecture, traditional dress, and cuisines. And not least, THE RHODODENDRONS. You will be able to walk through woodland and forest where several species will be in flower at once.

Stay in the ancient, walled Silk Road city Dali, visited 600 years ago by Marco Polo; and once overrun by Genghis Kahn. Dali sits at the foot of the Cang Shan, the highest peak of which rises over 4,000 m. Thirty eight rhodo species are listed for this range; at least a dozen species can be seen in flower on the walk and cable car ride up to Lake Ximatan, a glacial relic at 3,800 m.

Then there is the vast valley of the Mekong River to cross before traversing almost the full length of the Salween Gorge, one of the most spectacular on the planet. It runs parallel to, and receives tributaries from the Gaoligong Shan, a mountain range one hundred km long and containing over 5,000 species of flowering plants and conifers!

You will stay overnight at Gongshan towards the northern end of the Gorge, then diverge westward into the Dulong Gorge, famed for its incredible diversity of rhododendrons!

On the last several days we will make an excursion to Jiaozi Snowy Mountain and stay in chalet accommodation at 3,100 m altitude for two nights, in woodland dominated by *R. rubiginosum* and *R. delavayi* – shell pink and scarlet!

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Ben and Xiaomei for more information on dates, tour fee, or booking forms, etc, contact:

Ben and Xiaomei Wallace
884 Bungendore Road
BYWONG NSW 2621
Phone 02 6238 0935
Email benwallace@bigpond.com



Restored South Gate of Dali



Lake Ximatan and Rhododendron shrubberies



R. neriflorum, common in the Dulong valley



Wuli village, in the Salween Gorge