August 2016

PO Box 296 Olinda Vic 3788
http://www.rhododendron.com.au

Newsletter of the ARSV

Reminder for renewal of Subscriptions for 2016/17

Renewals are now due for 2016/2017. Renewal forms have been sent out and for those who haven't renewed could you do so now.

PLEASE RENEW NOW.

A new species from China

Rhododendron leigongshanense C.H. Yang, Z.G. Xie, Y.F. Yu & Z.R. Yang

This species was described in late 2015 by scientists from the Forestry Academy of Guizhou. It is a small tree up to 5 m high found so far only from the type locality in evergreen broad leaf forest in Leigongshan Nature Reserve in Guizhou. Interestingly, the geology is limestone. It has thick leathery leaves up to 21 cm long that are violet when young, and densely glandular and wooly underneath. The authors consider it similar to *R. magniflorum* and *R. glanduliferum.* The flowers are white, aromatic and "succulent", trumpet-shaped, 7-lobed, up to 10 cm long and borne in clusters of 7 to 10.

Cheng-Hua Yang, Zheng-guo Xie, Yong-Fu Yu and Zhi-Rong Yang. 2015. Rhododendron leigongshanense (Ericaceae), A new species from China. Bangladesh J. Plant Taxon. 22(2): 119-123.

The picture reproduced here is from the original paper.

Azaleas really deserve a second look

This beautiful hedge of azalea in the Shisen-do temple in Kyoto reminds us of Japan's many species of rhododendrons, including numerous endemics, and the long association of Japanese culture with the genus. Check the ARS website then follow the pinterset link, and choose the "Rhododendrons in Gardens and Natural Landscapes" board for more pictures (and page 4 of this newsletter).

Upcoming events

September 17th 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm Afternoon tea at NRG Olinda to welcome new members

There will be an afternoon tea to welcome new members who have joined since 2014 at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda.

Meet at the ARSV library (housed in the Parks Victoria worker's tea room) at 1:30 pm. We will start with a tour of the propagation facilities and Vireya house then enjoy afternoon tea in the tea room or outside depending on the weather. We will then go round the gardens and new members can get an introduction to the gardens, their layout and the Society's activities.

The gardens will have started flowering and ending the winter drab period. No need to bring anything. Tea, coffee and goodies will be provided by the Society.

To get to the tea room, after parking come through the main entrance and follow the sign to the toilets. You will see the tea room on your left.

Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th September Ferny Creek Spring Show. Featuring daffodils, camellias, early spring bulbs and perennials. Saturday (12 noon - 4.00 pm) Sunday (10.00 am – 4.00 pm). 100 Hilton Rd Sassafras.

September 17th and 18th The Mt Macedon and District Horticultural Society will hold the annual Garden Lovers Fair on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 September 2016 at Bolobek, 370 Mt Macedon Rd Macedon. An entry fee of $10.00 admits visitors to the Fair and to the gardens of Bolobek.

November 1st to 4th September 17th and 18th New Zealand Rhododendron Association's 72nd Annual Conference to be held at Hanmer Springs Hurunui. Register at http://www.rhododendron.org.nz/conference_info_2016.

Saturday and Sunday 5th and 6th November 10 am – 4 pm The Australian Bonsai Community is holding its first ever Satsuki Azalea Bonsai exhibition at Bonsai Art Nursery, 236 Old Dandenong Road, Heatherton

Shisen-do in May" (CC BY-NC 2.0) by _Patrick Vierthaler_

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Grafting Asiatics (or too many vireyas?)

After some discussion with Alex Pottage ably assisted by Prue Crome, I gratefully received both *R. falconeri* and *R. eximium* scions for grafting attempts in early May 2016. I had limited rootstock in pots suitable for these grafting attempts, actually only two in pots, so I used other *R. grande* rootstock that I had planted out.

Alex provided me with nine scions of *R. falconeri* and six of *R. eximium*. The scions were of exceptional quality and I used various graft techniques, including side veneer grafts and tongue and whip depending on the suitability of both scion & rootstock.

I was distressed by the lack of available rootstock, either from the ARSV or from my own propagation, which I had lost in the 2009 conflagration at Kinglake West.

This shortage of big leaf Rhododendrons for their own appreciation, or as rootstock, is due, in my opinion, to the ARSV's penchant for subgenus "Vireya". My apologies to Argent & others.

To paraphrase Peter A Cox the aforementioned big leaf species are surely the monarchs of the Rhododendron species, if not the plant kingdom.

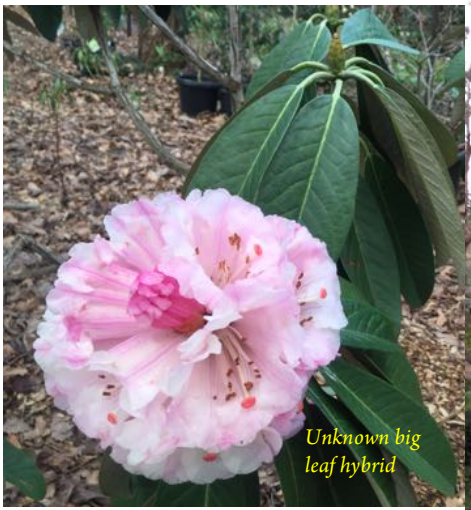
Cliff Renshaw

Fire-in-the-blood corner - Too many vireyas?

Our companion animal article is temporarily replaced this newsletter with a new occasional series, hopefully on-going, airing controversy and ideas. Do you agree with Cliff? Are we putting too much emphasis on vireyas? They appear a lot in the newsletter, our NQ expedition is about vireyas, we have built a Vireya house and in this newsletter Graham Price is launching a new Vireya hybridisation project. In terms of the amount of effort the few active volunteers are able to put in, the vireyas and the asiatics get equal billing but what is done is determined by the interests and energy of our active members. It also depends on the season and which project is in progress at the time. Vireyas may get more press because they flower all year round and we can always get pictures for the newsletter. When we are producing an article on what is happening now it is eye catching to have a flower picture. When it's the depths of a cold wet winter and there is a warm vireya house with flowers, I know where I would choose to get the picture of the moment! Check out the ARS website and the links to the Pinterest and Instagram pages (buttons at top right) to see how many photos of big-leaf Rhododendrons we have.

As on ongoing project our asiatic species collection is being reinvigorated with known provenance seed of new species of being imported and cultivated. We now have a large number plants, both species and hybrids, propagated from cuttings by our very small band of volunteers which are ready for sale or plantings. In discussion with Parks Victoria two new areas have been ear-marked for further expansion of species plantings. Updating our existing collection of asiatics at NRG takes much of our time, with weeding, pruning, mulching as well as GPS and labelling to update the database to find gaps in the collection. We have are around 450 species and loads of hybrids including Australian hybrids - **we just need more hands on help to get everything done.**

We need help to give the huge asiatic collection the attention we would really like to give it – identifying hybrids, mapping, collecting seed etc. What do you think? Have your say! Join in! Contact the newsletter editor.



Vireya Species Hybridisation Project (VSH Project)


Bold Janus

As indicated in the last newsletter, Dr Graham Price is establishing a long term vireya hybridisation project with the aim of evaluating the hybridisation potential of vireya species in the ARS collection at Olinda that have never been used before to produce hybrids.

Hybrids of Vireyas have been produced by many people over the years, but we have little idea of why they did the crosses nor why plant breeders persevered with some crosses and not others. The major factors in decision making appear to have been whether the cross was "better" than either (or both) of its parents and whether it was likely to be a commercial success. It is probable that many hybrids were somewhat fortuitous - what was flowering together at the same time because few people, Andrew Rouse being a notable exception, stored pollen for use later.

According to Chris Callard there are approximately 1000 named cultivars over 500 of which have been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society. All these have been derived from just 57 vireya species. Some excellent hybrids, mostly produced in Australia are: Bold Janus (*R. leucogigas x R. laetum* pictured above), Elegant Bouquet (*R. phaeopeplum x R aurigeranum*), Esprit-de-Joie (*R. konori x R. laetum*), Great Scent-sation (*R. konori x R. viriosum*), Kiandra (*R. zoelleri* "Island Sunset" x *R. brookeanum*), and Tropic Glow (*R. laetum x R. zoelleri*).

Photos of many hybrids can be obtained on the Chris Callard website (www.vireya.net) under the Vireya Hybrids Alphabetical list.

Graham is putting together a team (called the Hybridisation Team) of six to seven interested people to carry out the project, which may last up to 10 years and will be mostly carried out at NRG Olinda.

Phase 1 The first phase will involve checking the location of all the vireya species in the Vireya House and gardens at the NRG Olinda, preparing working maps of where each plant is located, photographing it, and entering details of the plant in a database (provenance, date planted, current size and condition, flowering status and when each is likely to be ready for crossing).

Phase 2 In the second phase the team will formulate a Hybridisation Plan

1. Research those species that have already been crossed with other species and how successful those crosses were.
2. Identify what species have not previously been used in hybridising and that are available at Olinda.
3. Establish an agreed set of criteria for assessing hybrids e.g. bush size and habit, leaf size and character, flower size and colour, presence of a scent or other interesting characters, resistance to diseases and pests, time to reach flowering stage etc.
4. Determine the objectives of each particular crossing. This is a critical element.
5. Establish firm guidelines as to the crossing procedures to be followed. For example is crossing to be done both ways, what is the procedure for preparing each flower, collecting pollen, transferring pollen and sealing the receiving flower, is pollen going to be collected and stored for subsequent use and if so how? How is the seed to be collected, cleaned, stored treated, sown, etc., what are the labelling and recording protocols and what logistics do we need for long term care and maintenance of crosses?

Phase 3 This will be the long-term hybridisation activities that will involve systematic crossings between the selected species, with extensive recording of the details in the database. We will need to establish plans as to how and where the seedlings will be handled and grown and when evaluations should occur, record regular progress as to the swelling of the seed pod, ripening and when seed is collected, germination, growth rate, treatments, flowering and assessment of plant and flower against previously established criteria. Progress reports will be presented in the Branch's newsletter and talks presented when opportunities arise.

Progress to date

Project Guidelines are presently being developed and a team assembled before any hybridisation activities begin.

This is a great project and needs keen volunteers – no previous experience is required.

Please Contact Graham on lithi01@bigpond.net.au or phone 0409 639 448

Bio Graham Price

Graham is a research geologist by training and spent 26 years in CSIRO in Melbourne, Perth and elsewhere. He joined the ARS in the early 80's and was president of the Victorian Branch and the National body then. His first interests were in the Maddenii group and the big leaf rhodos when he lived at Mt Dandenong. A move to Perth for 7-8 years restricted Rhododendron growing but he persisted with vireyas. And on his return to Melbourne he tackled vireyas with a vengeance making many vireya crosses and raising plants between 1998 and 2004. At one stage he had 5 shadehouses of vireyas at La Trobe University. He currently lives in a Melbourne CBD apartment with virtually no garden.

Satsuki Azaleas

In Japan the satsuki azaleas are legendary for their beauty and have been cultivated for centuries. Satsuki is the traditional Japanese name for the fifth month of the year, which in their older Chinese based calendar was in fact June not May. They have a huge following amongst bonsai enthusiasts and there may be thousands of varieties. As the photo shows the bonsais can be extraordinary and a taste of satsuki variation and beauty can be found at http://satsukimania.com/en/varieties. The variation in flowers is huge including monster flowers over 15 cm across, flowers that have no petals - only stamens, doubles, star shaped flowers, and 'Chojuho' with thick leaf-like petals lasting several months. Satsukis are the exception to the rule that azalea flowers have five lobes – some have 6 or even 7. The outstanding flowers are not hidden by foliage and several colours can occur on the same plant and the same flower.

The satsuki azaleas are the result of centuries of crossing two Japanese endemic Rhododendrons *R. indicum* and *R. eriocarpum*. *R. indicum*, despite its botanical name, is endemic to central and northern Japan (Honshu, Shikoku, Yamashina and Kyushu) while *R. eriocarpum* has a more southerly distribution on Kyushu, Yakushima and the Kuriles. It is possible, of course, that other azaleas have been used in their parentage. These crosses and the occurrence of spontaneous mutations ("sports") have produced a huge range of colours and flower types.

It is worth noting that the "indica" azaleas in trade and available in nurseries are generally not derived from *R. indicum* but from southern Asian species such as R. *simsii* and *R. murconatum* and tend to be less hardy.

Further discussion of this fascinating group can be found in Harold Greer's article "The Satsuki Azaleas" in the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society 38(4) Fall 1984.

For more photos go to the ARS website and go to our Pinterest pages (button at top right). Select our "Rhododendron bonsai" board.

Another new species from China

Rhododendron xiaoxueshanense R. L. Liao and Y. P. Ma

This new species is so far known only known from the type locality on rocks and cliffs at 3500 m on Xiaoxueshan Mountain, in Shangri-La county, NW Yunnan. It is a small upright shrub to 1.5 m high with small leaves to 9 mm long. The tubular flowers are borne on 2 – 6 flowered inflorescences, are 5 lobed, white to pink and 1-2 cm long. It is similar to *R. trichostomum* differing in the leaf shape, much smaller leaves, and calyx.

Rongli Liao, Dan Xue, Jens Neilsen, Jihua Wang & Yongpeng Ma. 2015. A new species of Rhododendron (Ericaceae) from Shangri-La, NW Yunnan, China. Phytotaxa 238 (3): 293–297.

The map to the right shows where this and *R. leigongshanense* (page 1) occur