

Newsletter of the ARSV



Moving a collection

Simon Begg has generously donated his marvellous collection of vireyas to the ARSV and it has been moved to the DRBG. Ten members of ARSV gathered at Simon and Marcias' place on 10th July and with the help of Parks Victoria staff sorted and carefully loaded the plants into members' vehicles and the Parks Victoria truck for passage to the botanic gardens at Olinda. Marcia provided a great morning tea and a good time was had by all. The plants are now in the propagation area at the gardens awaiting their final placement.



Renewal of Subscriptions for 2018/19

Just a reminder for those who haven't done so yet renewals are due. For those who only receive the newsletter by post the renewal form was included with the last newsletter. If you get the email version, with or without the printed version, the renewal form has been emailed to you already.

Life members, honorary members and those paid through 2018/19 will not receive a renewal form but could you inform the newsletter editor if your contact details have changed.

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Rhododendron in focus: *Rhododendron burmanicum*

Subsection Maddenia.

This species has a limited distribution in Myanmar on Mt. Victoria at 2700 to 3000 m. According to the Coxes in “The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species” this species is rare in cultivation and the plants which have been distributed are probably hybrids.

We have around 50 plants at the DRBG which have been propagated from the original English imported plants and some young plants from seed from Mt Victoria. While the English plants are unlikely to be the true species, they are none-the-less excellent garden plants and well suited to the Australian climate. The true species (inset) has slightly larger leaves and paler flowers. In 2013 Prue Crome visited Mt. Victoria and went to the locality of this species and found the park administration was planning to put a carpark on the site.

Alan Kepert



Keep those records

A recent article in the journal *Oryx* shows the importance of keeping records of plants in your garden. *Dracaena umbraculifera* was considered extinct and only “surviving” as cultivated specimens, not all definitively identified, in a few botanic gardens. The species was described from a specimen, supposedly from Mauritius, in the Schönbrunn botanic gardens in Vienna in 1791. It had never been seen in the wild by a botanist so was presumed extinct. A team from the Missouri Botanic Gardens thought it may not be a Mauritian species so collected material for genetic analysis from the type specimen and from living plants in the few botanic gardens that held plants under that name to compare with other species of *Dracaena* from Mauritius and Madagascar. While at the Mauritius herbarium they were told of a local gardener, Mr. Imran Vencapéh, who had a specimen, so they collected genetic material from that also. They later found that Mr Vencapéh had posted the locality of his plant, Ile Ste. Marie off the northeast coast of Madagascar, on the website Dave’s Garden in 2007.

The analyses showed that the type specimen, Mr Vencapéh’s plant and some of the cultivated specimens in botanic gardens were genetically close together but closer to other Madagascan species than to Mauritian ones. This strongly suggested Madagascar as *D. umbraculifera*’s origin. They ultimately located the plant in Madagascar at the place Mr Vencapéh said it came from.

The interesting thing is that although the genetics indicated *D. umbraculifera* was closer to Madagascan species and thus more likely to be found in Madagascar than Mauritius, that information alone would have been unlikely to have enabled the plant to be rediscovered. Firstly, being genetically related to something else indicates you originated in the same place most likely but it does not necessarily mean you occur together now. Secondly, Madagascar is a huge place and the genetics cannot say where in Madagascar to look. Mr Vencapéh could.

The moral is that, if you are a collector, know the origins of the plants in your garden – they may help rediscover a lost species or rescue an endangered one. The plants you grow can be incredibly useful.

ARS Trip to Sabah, Borneo (May 2018)

Eight ARS members – Dale Schubert, Prue Crome, Neil Puddey, Ray Weeks, Henry Hancock, Chris Hodgman, Enrico Ciarrocchi and Andrew Rouse - signed up for the 10-day ARS trip to Sabah.

Some of the tour group travelled via Singapore so we could visit Gardens by the Bay, and particularly the Cloud Forest, a vast conservatory that houses a four-story structure on which cloud forest plants are grown. Neil Puddey has been supplying vireyas to the Cloud Forest for many years, and it was amazing to see how integral these plants are to the floral display in the Cloud Forest. For those visiting Singapore a trip to the Cloud Forest is a must.

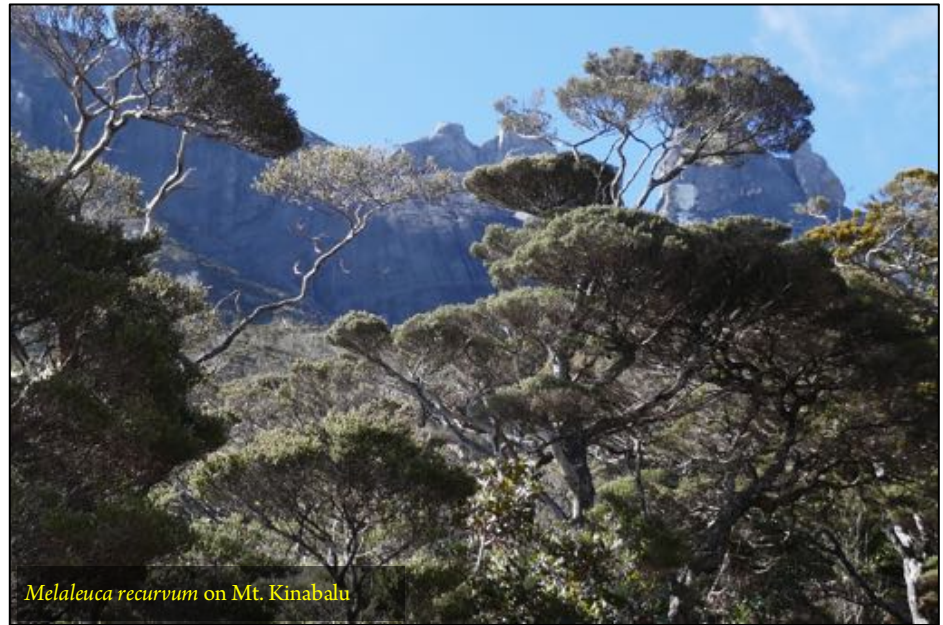
The group met in Kota Kinabalu and then travelled on to Mt Kinabalu. After a night near the park headquarters, we commenced the walk up the summit trail to the Laban Rata accommodation at 3,270 m. Along the way we observed *R.*

cuneifolium, *R. javanicum*, *R. crassifolium*, *R. fallacinum*, *R. rugosum*, *R. stenophyllum*, *R. acuminatum*, *R. lowii*, *R. buxifolium* and *R. ericoides*. Highlights were *R. buxifolium* in full flower around Raban Lata and *R. lowii* in flower at Paka Cave. Three of the group summited the following morning and found plants of *R. ericoides* growing amongst sheltered ledges within a couple of hundred metres of the summit. These plants are exposed to harsh conditions, bitterly cold nights, strong winds and storms, and grow horizontally, with some up to 2 metres long though barely 50cm above ground level.

We then visited the abandoned Mamut mine site on the south-east flank of Mt Kinabalu. The mine site is at about 1,500 m, the same altitude as the Kinabalu park headquarters. The mine was closed in 1999 and left un-rehabilitated. Twenty years on, it is fascinating to see the natural regeneration that has occurred, with vireyas one of the major pioneers growing on the exposed slopes. Here we observed *R. orbiculatum*, *R. polyanthemum*, *R. stapfianum*, *R. javanicum* ssp. *brookeanum* v. *kinabaluense*, *R. praetervisum*, *R. suaveolens*, *R. borneense* and possibly *R. bagabonum*, growing amongst moss, ferns and *Nepenthes* on the ground. The vireyas seem to enjoy the conditions and the high sunlight and low competition environment has produced some magnificent specimens.



Survivors at the camp on Mt Trus Madi



Melaleuca recurvum on Mt. Kinabalu



R. buxifolium at the base of Mt. Kinabalu



Neil Puddey in front on trail up Mt. Kinabalu



Arriving wet at Mt. Trus Madi

through lowland forest, where a single specimen of *R. longifolium* was discovered growing high up in a giant tree. The track progressively climbed through montane forest to the camp site in the mossy cloud forest at about 2,000 m.



Another river crossing

The group visited some lowland rainforest near Poring Hot Springs then travelled on to Gunung Alab in the Crocker Range. Around the park headquarters had been planted specimens of *R. burttii*, *R. orbiculatum*, *R. suaveolens*, *R. fallacinum* and *R. crassifolium*. A short walk in the forest around the park headquarters did not expand on this list.

The final destination was Mt. Trus Madi. At 2,642 m, it is Sabah's 2nd highest mountain and a more remote, less visited mountain than Mt Kinabalu. We commenced the 8km walk from Camp Dennis walking

the summit of Trus Madi. Whilst only 4 km the return trip took most of the day, on rough, muddy and at times, precarious trails. Along the way we observed *R. fallacinum*, *R. cuneifolium*, *R. suaveolens*, *R. crassifolium* (including a fine salmon-pink form in flower), *R. rugosum*, *R. stenophyllum*, *R. himantodes* and *R. lamrialianum* – the latter abundant on the summit.

The trip was a huge success and a special thank you goes to Dale Schubert who first suggested a Society trip to Sabah, and then took on organising the trip including all the arrangements with our tour guide. Thank you Dale!

A full report of the trip will be included in the 2018 The Rhododendron and there will be a presentation at the 2018 AGM.

Upcoming events

Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th August. RHS Camellias Vic & Waverley Garden Club present their Camellia & Garden Show. Sat 1pm to 5.00pm – Sun 10am to 4.30pm.

Mount Waverley Community Centre, 47 Miller Crescent, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149. Entry – Adults \$5.00 and Children free. <http://www.waverleygardenclub.com/>

Friday 24th to Sunday 26th August. Melbourne Orchid Spectacular & Victorian International Orchid Fair. Friday 24th 9:00 am - Sunday 26th 4:00 pm. Entry \$10. Boxhall Pavilion, KCC Park (State Dog Centre), 655 Western Port Highway, Skye 3977. <http://www.oscov.asn.au/event/oscov/>

Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th September. Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Spring Show- Saturday 12:00- 4.00pm, Sunday 10.00am – 4.00pm. Featuring daffodils, camellias, early spring bulbs and perennials. 100 Hilton Rd (East End), Sassafra, Victoria 3787 (Up behind the Ferny Creek Recreation Reserve).