

Newsletter of the ARSV



Renewal of Subscriptions for 2020/21

Renewals are now due for 2020/21. For those who only receive the newsletter by post the renewal form is included with this 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 2020/21 will not receive a renewal form but please inform the newsletter editor if your contact details have changed.

PLEASE RENEW NOW

What's happening at DRBG?

Members of the society have been unable to work in the gardens since the COVID lockdown and although the gardens are now open to the general public, members of the society are still not permitted to come in to work. Parks Victoria have been looking after the propagation area for us and we thank them for that. Tex has been keeping us informed and sent through some autumn photos of the gardens. For those who couldn't get up to see the autumn colours below is the iconic shot of the lake at this time

On a bright note, the stock of huge rocks for the Simon Begg NQ display bed have significantly increased thanks to recent earthworks near the DRBG. Nearby construction unearthed many monsters that needed to be removed so our site was a convenient nearby staging place while they waited to be put in their new home.



Committee							
John O'Hara	President	johnohara@optusnet.com.au	03 9593 1323	Graham Price		lithic01@bigpond.net.au	0409 639 448
Andrew Rouse	Vice-President	awrouse@bigpond.com	0424 750 406	Peter Grose		pgrose@bigpond.com	04 8877 3577
Michael Hare	Secretary	vicrhodo@gmail.com	0405 403 607	Dan Macleod		dan.macleod@parks.vic.gov.au	0400 594 319
Prue Crome	Treasurer	prue@crome.net.au	0419 659 741	Alex Pottage		niceplants53@gmail.com	03 5786 1595
Francis Crome	Newsletter editor	francis@crome.net.au	0417 730 291	Walter Lobbezoo	Librarian	wlobbezoo@parks.vic.gov.au	03 9751 1704

Rhododendron in focus: Rhododendron pemakoense

Section Uniflorum

The section uniflorum contains only five species - *R. imperator*, *R. ludlowii*, *R. pemakoense*, *R. pumilum* and *R. uniflorum*. All but the more widespread *R. pumilum* are restricted to southern and southeast Tibet and a little of northeast India and upper Myanmar.

R. pemakoense was discovered by intrepid explorer Frank Kingdom Ward in Pemakochung, Southeast Tibet, in 1924. It grows near the top of the Tsangpo Gorge at a quite high altitude of 3000 to 3050 metres. Kingdom Ward was attempting to explore and map the course of the river and could not complete the task due to the near-vertical cliffs and the dense vegetation. On returning to England he wrote "The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges" which has become a classic.

In 1998, two American adventurers, Ken Storm and Ian Baker, took up the challenge and were able to map the missing section of the Tsangpo River. This was no easy task requiring ropes and mountain-climbing gear to reach the gorge. They also found a waterfall in the middle of the gorge which was largely unknown. This was filmed and is truly an awesome sight with the river squeezed into a narrow gorge and over the falls. The new edition of "The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorge" by these authors includes a slightly updated version of Kingdom Ward's book with some additional chapters and photographs by the new authors. (Available in the library).

Most *Rhododendron* books record *R. pemakoense* as being restricted to Tibet but it extends into nearby Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India (<https://indiabiodiversity.org/species/show/253354>)

R. pemakoense forms a low, showy shrub and is spectacular when in full bloom. According to the Encyclopaedia of *Rhododendron* Species it is easily grown but the buds are frost tender. This is not a problem here and we have five healthy plants of *R. pemakoense* in the main rockery which put on a show of pale mauve-pink flowers every October. (see photo). Two of these are easy to find at the lower end of the stairs in the main rockery.

Alan Kepert



Another new species – *Rhododendron pudingense*

A new species of the Tsutsui subgenus has been described from Guizhou province in western China. It is a small leaved shrub with small pinkish-purple flowers in small 4-6 flowered inflorescences. Its habitat is interesting. It grows in cracks on limestone at elevations of 1300 – 1400 m. So far it is only known from the type locality in Puding county. It is considered to be extremely rare and endangered with maybe less than 100 individual plants.

It is closely related to *R. myrsinifolium* and *R. minutiflorum*, neither of which appear to be in cultivation in Australia.

Xiao-Yong Dai, Cheng-Hua Yang, Bing Yang, Pu Chen, Yong-Peng Ma. 2020. A new species of *Rhododendron* (Ericaceae) from Guizhou, China. *PhytoKeys* 146: 53–59. doi: 10.3897/phytokeys.146.51342



Updates on the North Queensland collection and the Simon Begg NQ bed

Not surprisingly preparations toward development of the North Queensland bed at Olinda have been slowed by the Covid restrictions and little has advanced over the last few months. Prior to that we had reached a point where funding for planning and building the garden had grown to \$240,000, made up from an extraordinary bequest from the Begg family, an Ian Potter Foundation grant and a State Government grant. We are fairly settled that the bed will be built in the old golf course land, in the corner above the lower lake and will be a foundation part of the landscaping of this extension to the botanic garden.

We have had interest expressed in preparing plans for the landscaping by three design firms.

- Glas Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, probably best known for their involvement in the recent redesign of the Melbourne University System Garden,
- Philip Johnson Landscapes, who are designing and building a garden based on their Chelsea Flower Show winning garden also be in the old golf course Olinda and will hopefully seamlessly flow into the NQ bed.
- Laidlaw and Laidlaw Design, the RBG Melbourne designer, who has expressed interest in an overall design for the old golf course incorporating the NQ bed.

When restrictions allow we will progress these options and hopefully start landscaping spring this year.

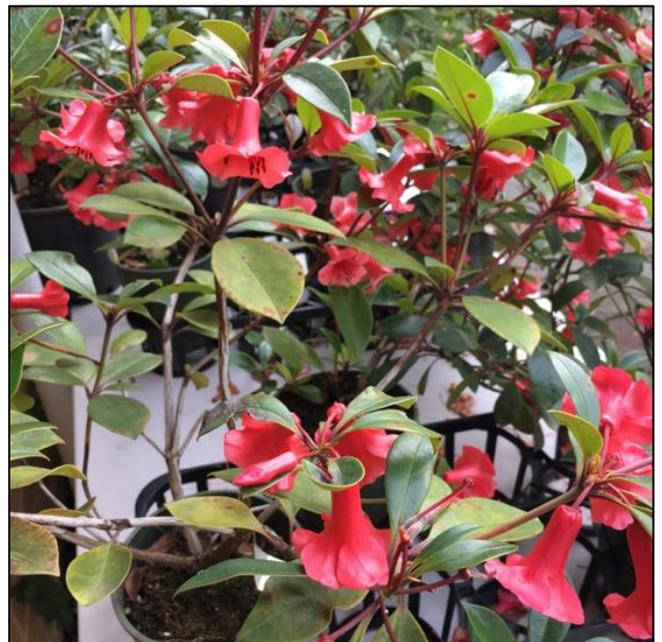
With the pending cessation of volunteer activities at Olinda and a skeleton staff on deck, we wanted to establish a safeguard collection at another location. So just prior to the lockdown and in consultation with Parks Victoria, we raced up to Olinda and packed into the back of the car a plant of each accession of the *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* collected in north Queensland. So, for the last couple of months Andrew Rouse has the plants in safe-keeping on trestle tables in his back garden. By the time we picked up the plants, flowering had finished with the exception of the Windsor Tableland plants which are flowering much later than the other accessions and were still in flower in May.

We are seeing considerable variation in susceptibility to fungal disease, with specimens from the Windsor Tableland highly prone to rust and powdery mildew to such an extent that we have been unable to eradicate it. It does beg the question whether it warrants planting out in a public bed if all we're going to be able to display is horribly diseased plants. On the plus side, it has flowered well.

Having these plants at home also means we can continue to propagate from cuttings to build up the plants required for the display bed.

Many years ago I (Andrew) found a specimen of the Mt Spurgeon form of *R. viriosum* in a pot at my parent's garden. Up to that point I was unaware that this form was in cultivation, so I moved the plant to my garden. It has flowered sporadically and not well, that is until this March when it was covered in flowers; perhaps Melbourne's wet start to the year has been a trigger for flowering?

John O'Hara and Andrew Rouse



R. viriosum in the NQ Collection - left from Mt Spurgeon, right from the Windsor Tableland. Note the comparison in leaf condition