

Newsletter of the ARSV

PO Box 296 Olinda Vic 3788

Flowering of *R. torajense* Craven



R. torajense is a new species described by the late Lyn Craven in 2014. It was first collected in 2002 in Tana Toraja (Torajaland) in southern Sulawesi. The Toraja are a people with their own language inhabiting the central mountainous region of Sulawesi. The only known location of this plant was on a roadside on the way to Mt Sesean about 1 km northeast of the town of Batutumonga. The plant was sterile and Lyn brought it back to flower and identify. It flowered for him in Canberra in 2011. The above photo was taken in late January in the Vireya House at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda.

Call for information – PLEASE HELP



The last page of this newsletter introduces our new website. An important part of it is a searchable database of Rhodos suitable for Australian Conditions. We still need a lot of information on species and hybrids and lack photos of many plants. CAN YOU HELP?

If you have any experiences with species or hybrids, think any should be added, or have photos PLEASE contact Prue Crome on 0419659741 or prue@crome.net.au.

November garden tour

On 29 November last year, the Society held a tour of three inner suburban gardens with over 20 Society members, family and friends taking advantage of a sunny Sunday to inspect three very different gardens of ARSV members. The tour started at the Wilkinson garden in South Yarra, a superb garden that is one of the jewels of South Yarra. In the shade of a towering elm tree, David Wilkinson talked about the history of the garden and the design elements that he introduced to great effect. The group then visited Clare Rouse's garden in Toorak, laid out by Edna Walling in the late 1920s and substantially altered over the decades as the original trees died, and as garden beds were extended in the 1970s and 80s to accommodate John Rouse's interest in rhododendrons. Two surviving trees, a Ginkgo and Pin oak are amongst the finest specimens in Melbourne, with the Ginkgo now starting to grow the characteristic protrusions from the trunk. Many of the larger rhododendrons did not survive the millennium drought and particularly Black Saturday, though the garden still has a number of the original vireya plantings from the 1970s. After lunch, the group then visited Andrew Rouse's garden in Hawthorn East and inspected what is arguably the most crowded domestic glasshouse jam-packed fully of species vireya, where head height hanging baskets are one of the hazards of growing too many plants in too small a space!

There was considerable positive feedback from the tour, and the society is considering options for tours and would welcome suggestions from members, including whether they are amenable to opening their garden for a tour.

Andrew Rouse



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Rhododendron in focus: *Rhododendron hyperythrum*

Subsection Pontica.

The Pontica Subsection has an unusually wide distribution stretching from North America to Europe, Asia, and Japan. The characteristics seem to be rather vague and the subsection includes tall or short species, with trusses of 5 to 30 flowers, colours pink to white or purple and leaves with or without indumentum. One solution would be to create a new subsection for the Asian species which would include *R. hyperythrum*.

At the National Rhododendron Gardens at Olinda we have one plant in the bed below the Vireya house and six more in the Maddenia Walk area. *R. hyperythrum* has no indumentum but there are small reddish dots on the undersides of the leaves. The flowers are generally pink in the bud and open to pure white flowers in a neat truss (see photo). It has a limited distribution in northern Taiwan at 900 to 1200 metres in broad-leafed forests. Other Ponticums in this geographical area include *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* from Yakushima Island, Japan which we all know fondly as “yaks”, and *R. makinoi*, an attractive compact shrub one to two metres high with glossy green leaves, which occurs in a small area of central Honshu.

The analysis of plant DNA has made great progress in the last few years and some rhododendrons have now been re-classified on this basis. I would like to see an analysis of the Pontica Subsection. The value of DNA analysis has been shown by a recent analysis of Neanderthal man's DNA, and the discovery that most modern humans carry some Neanderthal DNA, so there must have been some hybridisation going on in the caves around 100,000 years ago.

Alan Kepert.



Companion Animal - Yak



On the subject of “yaks”, the real ones - *Bos grunniens* are ubiquitous in photos of the high mountains in the Rhododendron heartlands of China and the Himalayas. They are cold habitat specialists and thrive where domestic cattle (*Bos taurus* or *B. primegenius*) don't. Likewise they do poorly at the warmer lower elevations where domestic cattle do best. Most yaks in photos are in fact domesticated animals and many are hybrids with domestic cattle. Such hybrids are called dzo and probably all piebald animals you see are dzos.

Wild yaks still exist and are all dark, long-haired beasts with big “manes” of long hair hanging from their undersides. Overgrazing of the alpine areas by domestic yaks increases the abundance of woody shrubs such as the *R. nivale* *R. rupicola*, *R. hippophaeoides* and others which we prize so much. Not so good for grazing though. Wild yaks are now more or less restricted to northern Tibet, western Qinghai, and southern Xinjiang with outliers in Ladakh, Sichuan, Nepal and Bhutan.

North Queensland expedition progress

The mountain research program is progressing rapidly. A memorandum of understanding has now been signed between our society and James Cook University and Darren Crayne of the Australian Tropical Herbarium in Cairns ran a highly successful planning workshop in March. The workshop brought together botanists and ecologists with decades of experience in the high mountains of the wet tropics from the Australian Tropical Herbarium, James Cook University, CSIRO, the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Queensland herbarium and others. Francis Crome attended on behalf of our society.

The workshop presented the fundamentals of why the project was developed viz that climate change threatened to eliminate the montane peak habitats. The project therefore aims to

1. refine our knowledge of population size and distribution on each peak,
2. set up monitoring plots on selected peaks and
3. bring into cultivation in botanic gardens the Rhododendrons and others selected species from each peak as a long term safeguard.

The workshop then went through all the known mountain top endemic plants (58 species) and gathered the pooled knowledge of their distribution and ecology. It then decided on a final list of target mountains. The targets in order of priority and the proposed dates of sampling are

1. Mt Finnigan 3/10/16
2. Main Coast Range, Carbine Tableland 12/9/16
3. Thornton Peak 17/10/16
4. Mt Bellenden Ker 15/8/16
5. Mt Bartle Frere – 29/8/16
6. Bell Peak North – 6/6/16
7. Mt Fisher - TBA
8. Mt Lewis – 9/5/16
9. Mt Spurgeon - TBA
10. Mt Windsor - TBA



Mount Finnigan Pencil Orchid *Dockrillia brevicauda* (photo M. A. Clements)

For members who cannot attend the strenuous expeditions the ARSV is organising a trip in the first two weeks of August 2016 to visit the sites accessible by road. If you are interested please contact Andrew Rouse on 0424 750 406 or awrouse@bigpond.com.

Obituary - Peter Damman

With the passing of Peter Damman goes another link to the earliest days of the Australian Rhododendron Society. Whilst Peter was not a foundation member, he was amongst the first to become a member of this fledgling society. With his passion for rhododendrons he soon became involved in the decision making as a committee member. He recalled to me many of the heated moments when this new society broke away from the Ferny Creek Society. Peter remained on the committee for many years where he also held the position of treasurer and president and was awarded life membership for his untiring services to the Society.

Peter was definitely a 'hands on' person becoming involved in the initial development of the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda. He was amongst the band of volunteers who erected the show hall and meeting room and cleared the rubbish and tangled undergrowth in preparation of the first plantings. When the second 50 acres was opened up for planting, Peter was in his element. Many young 'big leaf' rhododendrons were planted by him along the Mathias Road boundary. These came from his own seed raised stock. He stated that 'they won't be true but they'll be nice'. Peter became the first garden director with Laurie Begg as his head gardener. He also planted many of his rare species around the garden, but, unfortunately he didn't disclose their whereabouts to enough people so many remain lost.

Peter's interest in rhododendrons began at an early age. His father purchased a holiday home in Olinda and being a keen gardener, he proceeded to plant many of the rhododendron cultivars which were available at the time. When Peter became more involved with the genus his passion turned to the species, which led him to a lifetime of obtaining seed, importing plants and developing a garden of rare treasures. Peter was a prolific propagator and many of the resultant young plants were then donated to the gardens or given to other enthusiasts.

I first met Peter when he purchased land at the rear our property. On a number of occasions my late husband and father-in-law were called upon to act as extra weight on the tractor when Peter chugged up the track beside our property with loads of semi-mature rhododendrons. Our family watched as the perimeter plantings developed along the cleared land. It was at this stage that I really got the 'rhododendron bug' and I can really thank Peter for his encouragement and generosity.

Peter was a man who liked to see his dreams come to fruition but then he moved on to something new. His frustration with the establishment and the direction he thought the Rhododendron garden was going got the better of him, so he sold up and moved to country Victoria.

Peter will be remembered as a man of action and the projects he initiated around the Rhododendron Gardens will remain for all to enjoy for many years to come.

Lesley Eaton

The new website - www.rhododendron.com.au

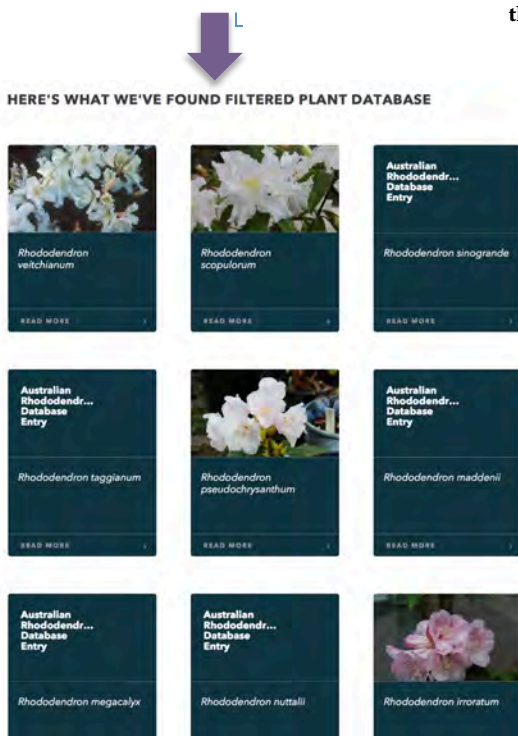
Following a series of fatal hacking events to the platform our previous website was built on the ARS commissioned a new website last year. It was a long task to reload the content onto the new site but the new site has a new additional range of features, which makes it incredibly useful. Prue Crome managed the process and got the company constructing the site to add a searchable database of Rhododendrons suitable for Australian conditions. She then spent months populating the database with information. Check it out.

- Clicking our logo on any page always returns you to our home page

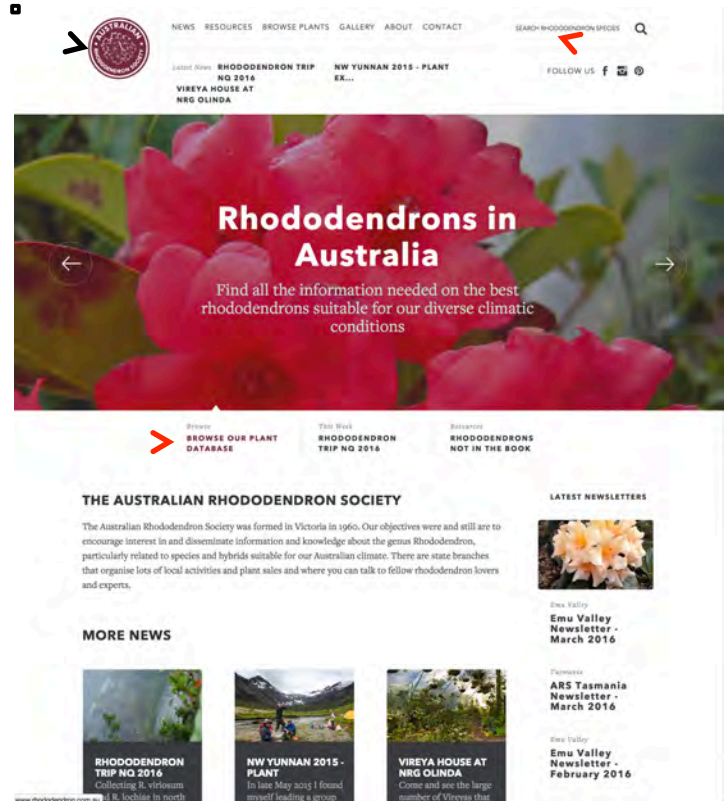
- Click to search for a Rhododendron suitable for Australian conditions (can also click on "BROWSE PLANTS" on the top line to access the database)



- Click your choices then click search. This is what we found for "ASIATIC", "SPECIES" AND "WHITE"



Our home page



- Clicking this section, which may or may not have a picture, retrieves the information we have so far

- Search facility – type a name where it says "SEARCH RHODODENDRON SPECIES" and click the magnifying glass icon. It also retrieves links to downloadable pdfs that have info on the species.

