

Newsletter of the ARSV



“Restoring Glory” ARSV Planting Day at Olinda Police Station

By Parker McKenzie, Journalist, Star News Group, Ranges Trader Star Mail (published 17th of May 2022)

Within the lobby of Olinda Police Station, a newspaper clipping hangs on the wall showing the garden which decorated the old police station down the road. When Sergeant Richard (Roy) Higgins first came to Olinda Police Station 18 months ago, he saw the difference between the current landscape and the heritage police station’s garden and knew he wanted to do something about it. “When I came out and looked at our garden, I thought it looked just like a barren desert,” he said. “Why can’t we make it exactly the same? It might not happen fast, but in 10 years’ time, it should be exactly what the old police station used to be.” He decided to approach the Australian Rhododendron Society – Victoria Branch (ARSV), who looked after the nearby Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden, to plant a new garden outside the station.

Prue Crome from the Society said the garden would feature different colours and varieties of the plant when they matured. “It’ll probably start looking good in about two or three years and then at some point down the track in 10 to 15 years they will get too big,” she said. “Roy is going to sort out a sign to promote the Society. Rhododendrons are actually really tough plants.” The brightly coloured plants usually bloom sometime between late winter and early summer. Sergeant Higgins said it was important to recognise the hard work of the Society for not only the police station, but Olinda as a whole. “Without them and their efforts, we couldn’t get it done,” he said. “I’m looking forward to seeing what comes out.”



ARSV is one of the many volunteer groups throughout the Dandenong Ranges we have highlighted for National Volunteer Week. This year’s theme is Better Together, as volunteering brings people together, builds communities and creates a better society for everyone - which is very present in this project between the Olinda Police and ARSV.

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“Countless Hours Spent” ARSV’s Prue Crome

By Parker McKenzie, Journalist, Star News Group, Ranges Trader Star Mail (published 17th of May 2022)

The Australian Rhododendron Society - Victoria Branch (ARSV) has been caring for the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden in Olinda, the premier cool-climate garden in the state, since the 1960s.

Prue Crome, from the Society, said she first joined when she wanted to work in the botanic garden. “Over the last 12 years it’s become a full-time job, I’m totally engaged in making sure the collections are safeguarded,” she said.



Prue Crome, ARSV Committee Treasurer and more

“The garden was initially established by the ARSV in the 1960s and it was allocated the land as a firebreak to Olinda by the then government of the day.”

The Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden is home to 15,000 rhododendrons, 12,000 azaleas, 3,000 camellias and 250,000 daffodils of various species and colours. It hosts the largest collection of Australian and overseas-raised hybrids of rhododendrons, which cannot be re-bred or imported.

Prue said the ARSV pushed for botanic garden status, which they successfully achieved. “The original people who set up the garden weren’t just Rhododendron experts, they were full-on nurserymen, landscapers and they knew lots of plants,” she said. “In those days you could bring in all sorts of exotic things that can no longer be put in. The collection is very broad.”

The Society meets every Tuesday at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden to care for its wide array of plants and flowers. Prue said the volunteers from the Society spend countless hours caring for cool climate plants in the garden.

“It really balances what is offered with the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne with its collection, and then the Olinda garden has the things they can’t grow in Melbourne or Cranbourne,” she said. “Sometimes a few of our members will go in there on another day of the week to do various jobs, particularly to do with irrigation.”

The Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden is open daily from 10am to 5pm and is free to view.

Prue said most of the infrastructure in the garden was built by the Society and has been upgraded over time with the help of Parks Victoria. “We do a lot of maintenance of our structures and we are in the throes of refurbishing all of the shade houses,” she said. “It’s a really friendly group who are passionate about all sorts of plants, not just rhododendrons.”

Prue said the garden was formally known as the National Rhododendron Garden.

“The collection is so important, not just to Victoria but also internationally,” she said.

“Aside from New Zealand, we probably have the largest collection of rhododendrons in the southern hemisphere, and also some other plants, exotics like maples, magnolias and camellias.”

Two Articles on Climate Change Impacts on Rhododendrons

Himachal: Rhododendron blooms early again, shifting baseline raises concern - Hindustan Times

By Richard Florey, Newsletter Editor

I came across this article in the Hindustan Times while researching findings of how climate is impacting rhododendrons. It was identified in Himachal Pradesh, a northern Indian state in the Himalayas, that its state tree rhododendron *R. buransh* had flowered earlier than usual for the second consecutive year.



This has raised concerns about the sensitivity and response to temperature and precipitation changes in warmer mountains. It is stated that the Himachal Pradesh forest department will now undertake scientific studies along with the Himalayan Forest Research Institute (HFRI) to study the effect of climate change on all the species of Rhododendron. The findings go on to state that climate change has also impacted other rhododendron species and so, this article makes for an interesting read and worth following up on in the future.

Chandigarh News. Updated on Mar 20, 2022, Gaurav Bisht, Shimla

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/himachal-rhododendron-blooms-early-again-shifting-baseline-raises-concern-101647720055299.html>

Will tropical mountaintop plant species survive climate change?

Identifying key knowledge gaps using species distribution modelling in Australia.

By the Australian Tropical Herbarium, Queensland

Upon request, the Australian Tropical Herbarium (ATH) in Queensland provided this article that was generated by the ATH and its associates.

In this abstract of the article from Biological Conservation, species inhabiting tropical mountaintops may be most at risk from the detrimental effects of climate change. Yet few regional assessments have critically assessed the degree of threat to species in these habitats. Here we model under three climate scenarios the current and future suitable climate niche of 19 plant species endemic to tropical mountaintops in northeast Queensland, Australia. The suitable climate niche for each of the 19 species is predicted to decline by a minimum of 17% and maximum of 100% by 2040 (mean for all species of 81%) and minimum of 46% (mean for all species of 95%) by 2080. Seven species are predicted to have some suitable climate niche space reductions (ranging from 1 to 54% of their current suitable area) by 2080 under all three climate scenarios. Three additional species are projected to retain between 0.1 and 9% of their current distribution under one or two of the climate scenarios. In addition to these declines, which are predicted to occur over the next 30 years in northeast Queensland, we discuss and outline pressing research priorities that may be relevant for the conservation of biodiversity on tropical mountaintop environments across the globe. Specifically, further research is needed on thermal tolerances, acclimation potentials, and physiological constraints of tropical mountaintop taxa as current species distributions are primarily determined by climatic factors.

Craig M. Costion, Lalita Simpson, Petina L. Pert, Monica M. Carlsen, W. John Kress and Darren Crayn.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S000632071530029X?via%3Dihub>

Member's Garden – Jevan Strudwick, Sassafras (Dandenong Ranges), Victoria

I potter among the Mountain Ash and Acers in our slice of wooded paradise in Sassafras, located in the Dandenong Ranges, Victoria. I have always had a great interest in plants and the natural world since a young age. As I grew up, priorities shifted and I lost touch, and my fingernails became clean and free from soil. Then six years ago, whilst living in a town in a terrace house with a tiny, but soul saving courtyard, my passion and obsession for gardening took hold once more, but with a tighter grip this time. It started with Echeverias, then it was rare Echeverias, until a new friend of mine and the current Treasurer of the Plant Trust, Damien Nieuwesteeg (who's family have grown roses and bulbs for decades) invited me to my first plant auction. That was the beginning and the end of it all for me and one thing led to another. Two years later, we bought our current house with a view to grow and nurture a collection.

The smell of trees and the feeling of soil became my life again. Every weekend I would visit nurseries and gardens which became my happy place, gaining inspiration and slowly then quickly putting our own stamp on our place. I was introduced to Otto Fauser, a horticultural legend, genius and now, a loving friend, who gifted me my first "special" Rhododendron, and to this day my favourite- *R. macronulatum* 'compact form', a 30-year-old specimen that's no taller than 30cm.



Our glorious garden was filling up with woodlanders and bulbs, and quickly the need for a cold glasshouse was essential so we built one out of old windows we had collected. This is where the collections grew. Cyclamen species, Primulas, Lilliums, Arisaemas, Trilliums, Galanthus, Crocus and alpines to name a few. Otto became my mentor and encouraged me to propagate in every way possible and as often as possible (as I write this I'm looking out onto a sea of pots and tags that will hopefully be bursting with life soon).



I adore Rhododendrons, especially the miniature and compact being my favourites. Not only their forms, but you can fit more in the ever-crowding garden! And there's something I adore in the often-simplistic beauty of their flowers or the surprising foliage.



R. ludlowii

Some favourites in my collection are *R. roxianum*, *R. ludlowii*, *R. keiskii*, *R. yakushimanum*, *R. pemakoense*, *R. pumilum* and *R. tapetiforme*. My knowledge of Rhododendrons is limited but hope to learn so much more in this group.

The garden is a glorious escape from my creative but albeit static desk job. I work in marketing and social media, with a background as a pastry chef and in fine art. Plant groups are my outlet, and I take great comfort in being with "my people" and the knowledge that's shared. My desire to join this group was to learn and be a part of the wider global network of passionate plantspeople conserving and preserving what could all potentially get lost for ever.

I very much look forward to contributing to future publications and events as a Rhododendron grower.