

Newsletter of the ARSV



President's Report by John O'Hara, President



The last few months have been a busy time for the Society, with a conference in Tasmania, a garden visit to Lavers Hill, the AGM, as well as our normal weekly activity.

The ARS Rhododendron conference was held from the 13th to 15th of October at Emu Valley Tasmania and in some nearby private gardens. The conference was attended by several Victorian members. An outline by Andrew Rouse of the highlights is given in this newsletter.

On the 19th of November, a group of 8 ARS members met at and toured Alistair Watts remarkable plant collection and garden at Lavers Hill. A description of this garden was given in last month's newsletter, so it remains for me to just outline some of the highlights. This was a rare opportunity to be taken on a tour, not just of this amazing collection but also vicariously around the world with Alistair as he describes each species and some of his travels to collect them. We managed, in our 3 hour tour, to see only about half of his collection. Starting in Chile, on through his rhododendron collection which included some grown as cuttings from plants produced from seed collected by Frank Kingdon-Ward. Alistair's conifer species collection is world class and it was a great privilege to get the chance to see it. His emphasis on Gondwana species, particularly his New Caledonia conifers, is remarkable.



The AGM was held on the 18th of November, with pretty much the same committee returned and only one executive position changed, with Emma Moysey taking over the role of Secretary. Thank you Emma for taking on this responsibility. Emma has very large shoes to fill replacing Michael Hare who has stood down as Secretary after some 17 faithful and diligent years in the chair. Michael has been an outstanding Secretary and public officer for the Society, always being on top of any constitutional or documentary matters as well as bringing an extensive knowledge of vireya Rhododendrons and their hybrids. Michael, the committee is very appreciative of your long and valuable service. Thank you.

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At the AGM, a motion was unanimously passed to elect Tom Noonan as a life member of the Society. Tom joined the ARS and began attending the Tuesday working group when he retired from Telstra, some 26 years ago. When he joined, it was a time when the Victorian branch was dominated by Rhododendron heavy weights including Bill Taylor, Murray McAlister and Ken Cathy. Fortunately for both the Society and the Rhododendron Garden at Olinda, Tom saw that he could make his most significant contribution by developing a record of the plants in the garden. Spending his own time learning how to use Microsoft Access proficiently, he quickly found a key role developing, updating and maintaining the Rhododendron database, something we still use to this day. The plant label hunting expeditions in the Garden to source the data for the database have become legend amongst the members of the Tuesday working group. Tom's mammoth effort has provided documentation on the species or hybrid and the location of the plant for the vast majority of Rhododendrons in the Garden and makes the collection the valuable asset that it is today. Tom's database is the foundation on which so much work now taking place in the Garden is based and while he is not engaged in these tasks, he has found himself taking on much of the technical support for all our plant labelling and nursery irrigation. Thanks Tom. Your diligence, dry sense of humour and polite gentle manner are key components to making the Tuesday working group such a successful and pleasant activity.

With that time of the year fast approaching, the executive committee and I wish all of the Society members a safe and enjoyable festive season spent with family and friends and travels. We sincerely thank you for your ongoing interest and support with the Society.

Workshop Activities

by Alex Pottage, Propagation Coordinator

Currently we are working through the nursery to sort out and repot plants for the Plant Collectors Expo at Ferny Creek planned for the 9th and 10th of March 2024 and it would be great to have more members attend on Tuesday morning to help out. The second part of the shade house has been refurbished so the benches are back in place and we are sorting out the nursery into sections, the Queensland collection, hybrids for sale, species collections. Propagating will be busy once the plants are ready for cuttings. We need to refresh the stock and add variety to the hybrid collection. Andrew Rouse has organised a list of tasks that will help volunteers select what they are interested in. Our Tuesday activities at Olinda are, as always, a great joy and it is so good to see that the numbers seem to be growing, with new starters being a common occurrence. The facilities at Olinda are free for members to use and our working together is a very good way for us to exchange knowledge as well as plant material. If you haven't been up to Olinda for a Tuesday morning activity session, then I invite you to come on any Tuesday from about 8:30 to 1:00pm.

What's In Flower at DRBG

By Peter Grose, Committee Member

These photos were taken this Spring, down in the bottom area of the garden about the Messmate Forest.



R. macabeanum



R. magnificum

ARS Conference held in October at Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden

By Andrew Rouse, Vice President

The Australian Rhododendron Society conference, superbly hosted by Emu Valley Rhododendron Gardens, brought together rhododendron enthusiasts from around Australia and New Zealand.

The conference was opened by Jeremy Rockcliff, the Premier of Tasmania, with Leonie Hiscutt, the Member of Montgomery (the state seat that encompasses Burnie and Emu Valley Rhododendron Gardens) also officiating at the opening. Ian Chalk, former chair of EVRG, provided a fitting tribute to Maurice Kupsch, one of the founding members of EVRG and its longstanding curator, for his unstinting service to the gardens.

The conference theme was 'conservation' in recognition of the irreplaceable collections of species and hybrids across our public and private gardens, with presentations focussing on current efforts to conserve important collections along with discussions on how we can better coordinate our efforts to ensure important species and hybrids are not lost to cultivation in Australia.

We were thrilled that Seamus O'Brien, Head Gardener at Killmacurragh, Dublin Botanic Gardens, accepted our invitation to be our keynote speaker. Seamus gave two presentations, the first on Killmacurragh, the satellite garden of the Dublin Botanic Gardens, that played an instrumental role in the 19th Century in the establishment of Himalayan rhododendrons in cultivation. His second presentation was on Joseph Hooker, with Seamus providing an account of an expedition he mounted to Sikkim where Joseph Hooker did much of his collecting.

Dr Marion MacKay and Andrew Brooker provided an overview of the New Zealand Rhododendron Conservation project. This project has led to a list of rhododendron species in New Zealand to be established with subsequent propagation and distribution amongst public gardens across the country. This project could be a useful template to guide Australian efforts to conserve species and hybrids in Australia.

The conference provided the opportunity to present the results of the Tropical Mountain Plant Science project or TroMPS for short. This project dates back to 2015 when the Australian Rhododendron Society, partnered with the Australian Tropical Herbarium (ATH) to recollect *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* in North Queensland and establish an ex-situ conservation collection at Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens. ARS also provided seed funding for genetic analysis, undertaken by Dr Sue Gardiner and her team in NZ, to ascertain whether genetic variability supported the classification of two species in Australia. Stuart Worboys from ATH provided an overview of the project. Dr Sue Gardiner summarised the findings of the genetic analysis, that pleasingly support the *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* as two distinct species, and I provided an update on the living collection held at DRBG and progress with the Cloud Forest Garden, a public display of these rhododendrons and other species collected by the project.

Delegates enjoyed leisurely tours of the EVRG collection guided by Maurie Kupsch, and we were fortunate to see EVRG at its Spring best.

On Day two, we visited two local gardens. Ian and Jenny Chalk have established a vireya collection at their garden in Sulfur Creek, about 10 minutes out of Burnie. Ian has very healthy vireyas growing in full sun within 100m of Bass Strait! We then visited the garden of Bob and Derelie Cherry. In their 'retirement' from running a commercial nursery in NSW, they have created a large nursery along with a stunning garden.

The last ARS conference was in 2014, so it was lovely to be able to catch up with friends old and new, and to chat about our common interest. A conference is a major undertaking, so a huge thank you to Geoff Wood, Ant Dry and Nicole Maxwell and all the volunteers at EVRG for their hospitality, warmth and friendship that made the conference such a success.



Conference dignitaries

Jeremy Rockliff, Premier of Tasmania,

Maurie Kupsch, EVRG Curator,

Leonie Hiscutt, State Member for
Montgomery,

Seamus Obrien, Head Gardener,
Killmacurragh and keynote speaker.



Ian Chalk showing his vireya collection.



Bob Cherry and conference delegates.



Photo courtesy of Alan Maxwell, EVRG Volunteer Horticulturist.