

June 2024

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# Newsletter of the ARSV



## Getting involved with ARSV at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden

John O’Hara, ARSV President

The Tuesday group at Olinda continues to slowly get bigger with lunchtime at times being a bit of a crush in the tearoom. There is plenty of interesting work still to do at Olinda and Tuesday’s are always full of great discussions. So, if you want to see what we do or want to use the ARSV’s propagation facilities or even if you just want to grab an unusual plant or two then come along any Tuesday morning to the tearoom at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden, the fire is always warm and cosy.

Also, there are still committee positions free if a member wants to be more involved or keen to help direct what the ARSV do. Just contact me or any other committee member. It is not onerous.

In this edition, we read about how timing is everything for the ecological mystery of harmonious rhododendrons, written by Ellen Phiddian of Cosmos Magazine as well as an insight into the Dandenong Ranges Botanical Garden, written by Augustine Zycher of Women *Going Places*.

## ARSV Annual Membership Renewals 2024-2025

Richard Florey, ARSV Membership Manager



For paid memberships, it is that time of year again for annual membership renewals. The ARSV domestic and overseas membership forms are included in this newsletter edition. The ARSV communicate to members via the website, social media and hard copy publications. Please let us know your preferred method of receiving information whether via post, email or both.

The ARSV Newsletter is published bi-monthly with news and activities, items of local interest and any forthcoming activities. Event dates are on the website as well as in the newsletter.

The ARSV national journal, *The Rhododendron*, is published yearly as a high-quality colour publication featuring articles on the genus from contributors throughout Australia and overseas. It is sent to members and released at a later date on the website.

## Updates from members

By Richard Florey, ARSV Newsletter Editor

ARSV has members across Australia and overseas and it would be good to receive news or articles from you that we can put in the Newsletter from time to time. Such as, has anything of interest flowered? Any triumphs or disasters? Have you visited any interesting nurseries or gardens? Do you know of any upcoming events? Or even a question for other members? Please email your snippets and separate JPG photos to me at richarddflorey@gmail.com.

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## ARS (VB) Facebook Group for Members Only

By Richard Florey, ARSV Newsletter Editor



In December 2022, I created a Facebook Group for ARSV (VB) members only, of which a few have joined and posted some great photos from their gardens and received comments. This group allows for members to engage with each other on their love of rhododendrons and gardening.

It is a great place to share stories, field trips, photos, triumphs and failures, and to help each other by sharing knowledge, and the benefit of getting to know other members. Note that questions intended for the ARS (VB) to answer should continue to be made on their public Facebook page. I encourage you to join the group, and may ask for newsletter articles.

## Timing is everything: the ecological mystery of harmonious rhododendrons

By Ellen Phiddian, Cosmos Magazine



Rhododendron meadows in China's Hengduan Mountains. Credit Qin Li.

High up in the Hengduan Mountains, east of the Himalaya in southern China, dozens of different rhododendron species live together in meadows. The fact that they do this is puzzling: why are there so many similar, but not identical, plants? Don't they compete with each other for resources, forcing some to adapt or die out? "There's this basic idea in ecology of the niche, that a species' lifestyle, like what it eats and how it fits into the environment, cannot be replicated in the same community," says Dr Rick Ree, a curator at the Field Museum in Chicago, US. There are over 30 different species in the *Rhododendron* genus within in the same area of the Hengduan Mountains.

Ree, along with a team of US and Chinese researchers, might have the answer. "Since there are so many closely-related species of rhododendrons, all living together in these mountains, we wanted to figure out how they were able to co-exist," says Ree. Apparently it's all timing, as the researchers have published in the *Journal of Ecology*. The rhododendron species all flower at different points in the year, meaning they don't compete with each other for pollinators. "By partitioning that timeline, they can reduce their chances of wasting their pollen and the resources that go into reproduction," says Ree. Lead author Dr Qin Li, a researcher at the Field Museum, figured this out by taking a field trip to Mount Gongga, in the Hengduan Mountains, documenting when different rhododendron species bloomed.



Qin Li doing fieldwork at Mount Gongga. Credit: Ji Wang

“I’d never done fieldwork in southwestern China before, but we were actually pretty close to my hometown in Sichuan province,” says Li. “With my field assistant and co-author Ji Wang from Sichuan University, I spent more than two months going to more than 100 sites, and we visited each of these sites four times throughout the season.”

The researchers logged a variety of ecological features for 34 different rhododendron species – including size and shape of leaves and flowers, when they bloomed, and where they grew. After statistical analysis, they found that the thing that differentiated the plants was when they flowered. “Going in, we had a hunch that timing would be important, but we weren’t super certain,” says Ree. “It’s kind of conspicuous that there’s a long season where you can see flowers in the Himalaya region – there are some species that put out striking blossoms against a backdrop of a field of snow, and others that wait till the end of the summer.” It’s troubling that timing seems to play such a big role in the mountain’s ecology – because it makes the flowers more vulnerable to climate change.

“There’s abundant evidence that the pace of climate change is messing with plants’ flowering times, causing population declines and extinctions,” says Ree. “The question is, how are plant communities around the globe going to respond? Weather is part of what signals them to blossom, and since climate change affects the weather, it’s likely to shift that competitive landscape. “When the environment changes, species have three choices: you move, you adapt, or you die. Climate change is accelerating that dynamic.”

Rhododendron ecology mystery solved in Hengduan Mountains, Cosmos Magazine, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022, <https://cosmosmagazine.com/nature/rhododendron-flowering-timing/>

## 100 Acres of Rhododendron Glory

By Augustine Zycher, Video Editor, Women *Going Places*



One of the most glorious ways to spend a day in spring is to drive to the National Rhododendron Gardens in Olinda, just outside Melbourne. 15,000 rhododendrons bloom in brilliant colours across 100 acres of hillside. The vista is breathtaking, whichever direction you gaze. The paths meander up and down the hills and you are enveloped in a cathedral of colour as you stroll along – hot cyclamen, blushing pink, pearl white, deep purple, flame orange, buttery yellow – each bush laden with flowers of overwhelming beauty. The variety and gradations of colour, the sheer lushness,

dazzle the eye. A large variety of other plants complement the rhododendrons – rows of cherry trees with their delicate pink blossoms, banks of colourful azaleas, camellias, magnolias and daffodils.

Abundant vegetation, shady trees and beautiful green lawns. It's an ideal place to walk, to picnic on the grass, and to rest by the two lakes.

The Rhododendron Gardens are an hour's drive from Melbourne. As you take the winding road up into the cool hills of the Dandenong Ranges, you are surrounded by soaring eucalyptus trees and dense ferns. These native Australian plants provide the backdrop for an extraordinarily successful plan to transplant and conserve threatened rhododendron species.

Australia, with its hot climate, would seem the least suited place in the world to save rhododendrons, particularly since these flowers originated in the snowy Himalayas. The earliest records from 1701, chronicle an Englishman going into China's inner mountain ranges to collect and send back to England 600 dried specimens of rhododendron. In his famed book, 'The Snow Leopard', Peter Matthiessen notes the rhododendrons at 12,500 feet on his trek up the Himalayas. He marvels that the "rhododendron leaves along the precipice are burnished silver" as they reflect the light of the glaciers.

In 1960, the members of the Australian Rhododendron Society persuaded the then Premier of Victoria, Henry Bolte, to grant 100 acres of state land to establish gardens dedicated to rhododendrons. The members of this Society then volunteered to undertake the herculean task of clearing the land, much of it by hand, and planting rhododendrons. During the long hot summers, volunteers of the Women's Auxiliary would drag heavy buckets of water up and over the hills to save the young plants. Since then, 384 of the 1157 species of rhododendron, or one-third of the genus, are threatened according to a study. Forest loss, climate change and population growth have all had a negative impact.

The Rhododendron Gardens are now under the management of Parks Victoria, but the ARS is still actively involved. They organised a Convention to bring together international experts, Australian and overseas field workers, park managers and collectors to discuss the challenge of rhododendron conservation in a changing world. They also inaugurated a newly restored greenhouse, Vireya House, which is dedicated to saving the vulnerable vireya species of rhododendron. Entry to the Gardens is free and even when the flowers are not in bloom, it is nevertheless a beautiful place to visit. And if you have not brought a picnic, after visiting the Gardens you can enjoy the many cafes and restaurants in the pretty villages of Olinda and Sassafras.

<https://womangoingplaces.com.au/100-acres-rhododendron-glory/#:~:text=Since%20then%2C%20384%20of%20the,ARS%20is%20still%20actively%20involved.>

**AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY VICTORIAN BRANCH, Inc. (ABN 70 723 138 385) (A5896Z)**

**Membership Registrar: PO Box 296, Olinda, Victoria 3788, AUSTRALIA**

Telephone: 0402 412 123, Email: richarddflorey@gmail.com

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Dear Member. It is now time, before 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2024, for renewal of your membership of the ARSV for 2024-2025. Please complete the form below and return it to the Membership Registrar.

**1. FILL IN THE AMOUNT TO BE REMITTED**

Name:	Amount Due	Amount Remitted
Membership Subscription for 2024-2025	\$35.00	\$35.00
Donation		\$
<b>TOTAL</b>		\$

**2. METHOD OF PAYMENT** Please tick the relevant box.

**Option 1: Bank Transfer**

Account Name: AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY VICTORIAN BRANCH

BSB: 633 000 Account Number: 165938945

**IMPORTANT:** Please put your name as the reference or description in the on-line payment so we know who it is from.

**OPTION 2: Payment by Credit Card - VISA and MasterCard Only**

**EXPIRY DATE (mm/yy)** ...../.....

CARD TYPE (Please tick): VISA  MasterCard

NAME ON CARD: ..... CCV

CARD NUMBER:

Your name if different from the name on the card: ..... Signature: .....

**OPTION 3: Cheque or Money Order**

Please make payable to "Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc." and include it with this renewal form. **Ensure you include your name somewhere (eg. on the back) to identify who you are.**

**3. MEMBER CONTACT DETAILS**

Name:	
Postal Address:	
Residential Address (Optional):	
E-Mail:	
Mobile Phone:	
Home Phone:	

**4. DONATIONS**

If you have made a donation to the ARSV you can specify what it should be used for. Amount or Proportion

	Amount or Proportion
1. Materials for benches, shade cloth, propagation, etc. for the propagation area.	
2. To help develop a conservation area in the garden expansion area (old Olinda Golf Course).	
3. To assist in building an extension to The Vireya House.	
4. Unspecified.	

The ARSV Newsletter will be posted and Emailed to all members. Tick this box ONLY if you **DO NOT** want it posted.

All ARSV Members will receive a printed copy of the annual journal "The Rhododendron".

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Telephone: +61 402 412 123, Email: richarddflorey@gmail.com

**OVERSEAS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Dear Member. It is now time, before 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2024, for renewal of your membership of the ARSV for 2024-2025. Please complete the form below and return it to the Membership Registrar.

**1. FILL IN THE AMOUNT (Australian Dollars) TO BE REMITTED**

Name:	Amount Due	Amount Remitted
Ordinary Membership Subscription for 2024 – 2025	\$50.00	\$50.00
Donation		\$
<b>TOTAL</b>		\$

**2. METHOD OF PAYMENT** Please tick the relevant box.

**OPTION 1: Payment by Credit Card - VISA and MasterCard Only**

**EXPIRY DATE (mm/yy)** ...../.....

CARD TYPE (Please tick): VISA  MasterCard

NAME ON CARD: ..... CCV

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Name:	
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