



# **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**

## **Dublin Group**



**NEWSLETTER NO. 49 - WINTER 2008**



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Front cover illustration is of *Erythronium revolutum* (Photo: Ian Young) and  
back cover (top) *Campanula chorubensis* (Photo: Zdeněk Zvolánek) and  
(bottom) *Pleione aurita* (Photo: Mike Gasson—Courtesy, Hardy Orchid  
Society)

## EDITORIAL

As 2007 draws to a close it is worthwhile looking back on what was a quite extraordinary year weather-wise, certainly in the Dublin region. January and February were wetter than usual, but March, April and the first half of May had exceptionally low rainfall, with the result that in early May there was a significant moisture deficit with even some woody plants showing signs of stress. It seemed that there was little likelihood that this deficit would be made up over the summer; so many gardeners were anticipating a rather difficult season. We need not have worried. What an awful summer we had, the wettest I am sure in my lifetime. We then had very little rain in September, October and the first half of November, leaving gardens exceptionally dry for the time of year. At the time of writing (late November) there has been some rain and we have yet to see what December will bring. Whatever happens next month, however, we can conclude that 2007 will go down in the record books.

Gardeners, more than most people, have been conscious for at least the past ten years that the climate has been changing. We now grow many plants outside that would have been brought under cover for the winter months ten years ago. We can say with certainty that the average winter temperature has risen, and that rain when it comes tends to be heavier than in the past, but otherwise the changing pattern is somewhat inconsistent. Climatologists tell us that we can expect wetter, warmer winters and drier summers, and they may be right in dismissing last summer as an aberration. All we can be certain of is that a change is underway and that this change will impact on the way we garden. In the gardening press we are urged to grow drought tolerant plants, but many such plants will be unhappy in wet winters. Maybe alpinists are the answer as they will tolerate dry conditions in summer, and, because of their small size, it is relatively easy to protect them from the worst of winter wet with a pane of glass. We shall have to wait and see.

Worrying about the effects of climate change on the way we garden is, however, a minor preoccupation when one considers the impact it may have on the future of humankind. Nobody can deny that global climate change is a reality, and few will deny that we have caused it. It may already be too late even to ameliorate the damage that has been done, let alone reverse it. The changes that are required in the way we live our lives in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently can be unpalatable, as **Jane Powers** bravely points out each Saturday in the *Irish Times Magazine*. Governments and big business, while acknowledging that climate change is upon us, are not taking the hard decisions; and there is little pressure coming from individual voters and consumers. The priority for almost all politicians is to be re-elected next time round, and big business is focused on the bottom line. It is not easy to be optimistic.

## NEWS & VIEWS

### In this Issue

**Ian Young** writes about erythroniums, that beautiful and underused genus. Ian has been growing these plants successfully for years and writes from experience. His article was written especially for the newsletter. **Zdeněk Zvolánek**, who edits the newsletter of the Prague Rock Garden Club, sent me his enthusiastic appreciation of *Campanula chorubensis* as well as the story of its introduction, as such, to cultivation. I am going to try this campanula in my garden, but given the very different climatic conditions that the plant will face here compared to those described by 'ZZ', I suspect it may be a little bit more difficult than he suggests. **Liam Byrne** has very kindly given me his fourth article on the cultivation of particular *genera*, writing about pleiones this time and specifically on *Pleione aurita*. In order to encourage more members to raise plants from seed I am including the article on the subject that I promised in the last issue.

Finally there are reports on the Group's meetings in the second half of 2007. Once again my sincere thanks to the contributors.

### Fixtures

I think we have a really great programme for the first half of the year. Congratulations to the Committee and especially to **Martin Walsh**, the Fixtures Secretary. The fixtures, with dates, times and venue are listed on page 35.

We kick off on 23 January with the AGM, followed by a talk from the dedicated **Paul Cutler** who is in charge of the gardens at Altamont. Paul's talk will be a very useful curtain-raiser to our visit to this important garden in February. I hope there will be a good turnout for this meeting because, apart from the obvious attractions of the lecture, the AGM offers members a unique opportunity to express their views on the Group's affairs to the Committee.

On 9 February our annual lunch will take place as usual at the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire, courtesy of **Joan Carvill**. After lunch we are honoured to have what I am sure will be a fascinating talk from the Director of the National Botanic Gardens, **Dr Peter Wyse-Jackson**.

Our visit to **Altamont** takes place on 10 February, just before the start of the annual snowdrop week in the gardens, and **Robert Miller**, who is reputed to have the best selection of snowdrops for sale in the country, will be selling on the day. While snowdrops will be centre stage at this time of year there is much more to be seen. Members should make their own way to

the gardens and there will be a modest €2 entry fee per person. See Map on p. 23.

On 21 February we welcome back **Jim Jermyn** the author of that fine book on European Alpines, published last year and reviewed in a previous issue. As many of you know, Jim is an accomplished and much sought after speaker and, as a protégé of **Jack Drake**, and former owner of Edrom Nurseries has tremendous knowledge and experience of growing alpines. This talk should not be missed.

**Martin Walsh** finally gets around on 13 March to telling us about his trip to Tibet, using video, PowerPoint and slides, a talk that I have been looking forward to for the past two years. Martin is a very experienced plant explorer and I think this was one of his more memorable expeditions. He is a photographer *par excellence*, and has an in-depth knowledge of the flora of the region. But the talk will be about more than plants and I have no doubt that afterwards we will all know a great deal more about this mysterious and fascinating country. You should be there.

On Saturday, 15 March our **Local Show** will be held in St Brigid's Parish Centre in Stillorgan. As well as the Show itself there will be non-competitive exhibits of plants and a forum on different aspects of cultivation, including a follow up to the article on seed sowing. Last year's event was highly successful and the Committee is looking forward to a good turnout again in 2008. Let's not disappoint them and remember to bring along a few plants for the raffle.

Our main **Show** is on 5 April at the usual venue in **Cabinteely Community School**. Val Keegan, our indefatigable Chairman and Show Secretary writes about this important event below. It is a wonderful afternoon out: gorgeous plants on the benches; a hugely impressive display of various artistic representations of plants; special plant exhibits; a practical demonstration; a unique chance to buy rare and unusual plants from our own plant stall and from five commercial sellers; book sales; a raffle with great prizes; high quality refreshments at unbelievably low prices; and good company. I could go on. Come and see for yourself and bring family and friends.

Three weeks later our good friends in the **Ulster Group** have their Show in the lovely setting of **Greenmount College** near Antrim town. Lots of members of the Ulster Group come down to our Show and we owe it to them to reciprocate. It will also be a great outing and the three week gap will mean that there will be different plants to drool over on the benches. Put together a car load on 26 April and head for Antrim. You won't regret it.

We have another treat on 10 April when **Ger Van Den Beuken**, a great Dutch grower of alpines, will talk on 'Growing High Alpines in the Lowlands'. Ger will be bringing plants for sale and will be open for business from 7.30 pm. I bought some plants from him by mail order in the summer

and he has some mouth watering offerings like *Daphne calcicola* for €10.

Woodland plants, which are becoming increasingly popular, will feature in the talk on 14 May from **Tim Ingram**, an experienced plantsman and lecturer from the UK. This is a joint lecture with the IGPS and will bring our spring lecture programme to a close in splendid fashion.

Our final event of the first half will be a coach trip on Saturday, 24 May, to **Lissadell** under the guidance of **Carl Dacus** and **Rachel O'Sullivan**, providing an opportunity to see the progress of the restoration of this historic garden. Full details of this trip are given in the booking documentation.

### **New Projector**

The Committee has purchased a new digital projector as well as a fine screen and stand. The total cost was in excess of €3,500 but this is a very good investment and brings us right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The high quality of the equipment is already being appreciated at meetings.

### **Digital Photography Course**

There is still interest in running another of these courses but unfortunately, for family reasons, Edwin Davison was unable to spare the time in the autumn. It is hoped that he may be able to accommodate us in 2008 and if a course can be organized we will notify you by email.

### **Helen Dillon's New Book**

*Helen Dillon's Garden Book* was published in November to great acclaim, and I'm sure many of you already have it. All gardeners, irrespective of what they grow, will benefit from this super book. It is a terrific read, amusing, provocative and full of the distilled wisdom of Helen's gardening life to date. **Robin Lane Fox**, the illustrious gardening correspondent of the Financial Times, in one of the most effusive book reviews I have read, described it as "the obvious book of the year for anyone who wants to take gardening seriously". If you don't have it, go buy. Incidentally, Helen, a great supporter of our Group, has promised me an article for the next issue.

### **The Library**

**Anne-Marie Keoghan**, who looks after the Library feels that this facility is being under-used by members. We have a comprehensive selection of books – the list is on the website, and if you don't have internet access you may

obtain a copy from any member of the Committee. Recent additions are Jānis Rukšāns' *Buried Treasures* and Jill Cowley's *The Genus Roscoea* both of which will be reviewed in the next issue. AnneMarie would welcome suggestions from members on books they would like to see in the library.

## **Our Website**

**Jamie Chambers** writes:

"Here is the latest information on our website – [www.alpinegardensociety.ie](http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie). There have been no dramatic changes to the site since the last newsletter, but we do now have a place to put more of our pictures – see the Gallery page for the winning photos from our trip to the Burren in May. I will put up more photos as time allows.

Pictures attract visitors: the website statistics show that many visitors are brought to our site by searches for images of plants, and they are often using them in their online discussions. For example, someone took a fancy to Val Keegan's picture of *Eranthis hyemalis* so now it's on a plant forum at [www.svetbiljaka.com](http://www.svetbiljaka.com). Is this a Czech website? There's simply no telling where these pictures will end up. Carmel Duignan's *Dianthus callizonus* was used to send a cheer-up greeting on a [www.jehovahs-witness.com](http://www.jehovahs-witness.com) discussion group. So use of the website continues to grow. For November (compared with May) we had 3,592 hits (3,174) and 661 sites visiting us (455), and I can also see that people are regularly downloading information such as the show schedule and, most importantly, membership forms!

Ideas for new pages on the website are always welcome, so email any suggestions to [agsinfo@eircom.net](mailto:agsinfo@eircom.net) and I will see what I can do. Current plans include a page on plants to be avoided at all costs (following on from George Sevastopulo's presentation at Termonfeckin) and a list of bookshops worth consulting for gardening books. Happy Christmas browsing!"

## **Plants at Meetings**

**Joan Carvill** has asked me to remind members to bring plants which are looking well along to meetings. This provides an opportunity to exhibit good plants throughout the year and not just at Show time.

## **The Shows**

**Val Keegan** exhorts you all to try harder.

"When did you last check your Alpines?"

Have you got a prospective show plant among them? It is amazing what a little TLC can do to a plant!



I am afraid we are approaching that time again – our Show!! This year Cabinteely is early - Saturday 5 April - please find at least one plant for it and do not forget that we have foliage classes.

Beginners, please remember the Section C plants, they are what you are competing with, not the ones in the Open Class - you are bound to have a better one! With the early Show, possibly dig them up early and give them some shelter plus the TLC. Any of the old hands would be only too willing to advise you.

Seriously, the Show is the major event of the year. It is our window to the public and hopefully a fund raiser as well. This introduces the topic of plants for the sale – when tidying up your garden, please pot up any bits for the stall. They do not need to be alpines - all plants welcome.

Remember, to succeed, a Show has to have as many visitors as possible, so encourage all your gardening friends and acquaintances to come along, view the superb plants, buy many more at good prices and see for themselves what a friendly group alpine gardeners are! Michael Meagher has pots for sale if you need them.

We will of course need all your help, as usual, to run this extravaganza – no reasonable offer refused!

Do your best to come, enter your plants, bring your friends and help us to make it our most successful Show yet.”



A section of the Dublin AGS Show 2007 (Photo: Billy Moore)



Ian Young, hard at work in one of his bulb houses (Photo: Ian Young)

## ERYTHRONIUMS IN THE GARDEN

My first introduction to the genus *Erythronium* was through the appropriately named *E. 'White Beauty'*. We bought one plant from Jack Drake's Nursery in 1972 and we now have thousands. *E. 'White Beauty'* would be near the top of my list of the best garden plants for beginner and expert alike.

*Erythronium* is a genus of 24 to 30 species, depending on the taxonomic treatment, and with the exception of *E. dens canis* and its related geographical variations *E. caucasicum*, *E. sibiricum* and *E. japonicum*, all are found in North America. It is unfortunate that so few of these wonderful plants are currently available to buy as bulbs from the trade, but if you search the seed lists of the SRGC, AGS and NARGS, as well as some of the specialist trade lists, you can find seed of most of the species. Erythroniums are not difficult to raise from seed but you do need to be patient as it takes

on average five years to get them to flowering size.

## **GROWING FROM SEED**

We use our standard mix of potting compost which we prepare ourselves. Measured by volume it is two parts loam, one part leaf mould and two parts sharp grit, to which we add some bone meal. The important thing about the compost is that it must remain open and be able to hold both air and moisture while letting excess water drain away quickly. We now have a steady supply of leafmould which has become our first choice for our compost mix; not only because it helps retain moisture, but because it also adds some nutrients for the bulbs. You could use peat or some of the other forms of humus if you cannot get leafmould.

If you garden in a warm dry area, like Dublin, you will have to increase the amount of humus in the compost or water very frequently to help keep the bulbs moist: erythroniums do not like to be hot and dry.

### **Sowing the Seed**

The seed is best sown as soon as you can get it, ideally before the end of August; this will always give a quicker and better germination. Erythronium seed, however, stores quite successfully and reasonable results can be achieved from two and three year old seed. We always soak any dry stored seed overnight in some warm water to which we add the smallest amount of soap which helps the seed absorb moisture by breaking the surface tension.

Our favourite pot for sowing erythronium seed in is a square, deep plastic pot 9cm x 9cm x 12cm deep; this size will easily accommodate up to fifty seedlings. Fill the pot to 2cm from the top, spread your seed evenly and cover with a 2cm layer of 3mm to 6mm gravel, water well and place in a sand plunge left open at all times until germination.

A good proportion of freshly sown seed will normally germinate in the first spring, stored seed is more sporadic and germination will occur over two or three years. The grass-like leaf will poke through the gravel bent double at first before straightening out to its full height.

Seed can start to germinate from January onwards and, once a pot has started to germinate, some overhead protection is advisable during periods of bad weather. We find that the seedlings are perfectly hardy as far as the cold is concerned but do suffer from the physical battering that rain, hail, snow and wind can inflict.

Keep the seedlings growing as long as possible making sure that they never dry out. Apply liquid feeds at two-week intervals to help build the young

bulbs. You should find that seedlings can keep growing much longer than mature plants and will often grow until August if kept cool, moist and well fed. An extra few weeks now can save a year on the time it takes to get a flowering plant.

### **Pricking out**

We never prick out erythroniums in their first year as invariably there will be more to germinate in their second and third years. It is normal to get some new germination in the second year, and this will occur before the one-year old seedlings appear, so your pot will have a mixture of first and second year bulbs, but the treatment is the same as for the first year with more regular feeds. If your seed was not as fresh as it could have been, germination may be slower. It is a good idea to note the number of seeds that you sow on the label as this will let you know what proportion have still to germinate.

Pricking out is done in August when we tip out the pot to see what we have got. Always be careful when you pick up the pot as erythroniums have a habit of escaping through the drainage slots into the sand plunge below or, more annoyingly, half in the pot and half in the plunge: this requires careful surgery to cut the pot away without damaging the bulb. If you use the square plastic pots you can get a good idea of what you can expect to find by feeling the sides. If you detect a bulge then you should have a good crop, the fatter the bulge the better. The young bulbs are carefully separated from the old compost. Constant shaking in a tray as if you were panning for gold helps to bring the bulbs to the surface.

If there are a small number of bulbs they are repotted into the same pot with fresh compost where they will stay until they flower. The 9cm x 9cm pot can accommodate ten bulbs up to flowering size quite satisfactorily. If we have sown the seed very thickly, which is our normal practice, we then have to either split the contents through several pots or use a polystyrene fish box. Nowadays when we are sowing a large quantity of seed, 100 plus, we tend to sow straight into a fish box trough and cut out the pricking out stage. The trough is top dressed annually and liquid fed during the growing season so we do not need to repot until we have flowering sized bulbs. To do this it is essential that you have a good compost that will retain its structure for the five to seven years required. We have found that the ideal size of polystyrene box for growing bulbs is 39cm x 30cm and 29cm deep. If the bulbs are intended for the garden they can be planted directly into place at the pricking out stage.

The best erythroniums to start with, and the ones that you are most likely to find available as bulbs, are *E. californicum*, (especially 'WhiteBeauty') *revolutum*, *oregonum*, *tuolumense* and *dens canis* - *Erythronium japonicum* is one of the most beautiful and should be grabbed if ever you see it on offer. The bulbs do not like being out of the ground so plant them quickly when you get them, and then you will enjoy their beauty for many years.

### **Garden conditions**

Erythroniums grow best in a well drained humus rich soil, and I have found they do especially well when leaf mould is mixed generously into the planting hole, especially if your soil is heavy. They like to be covered by a minimum of 15 cms of soil and most will take themselves considerably deeper than that. Like all bulbs they can tolerate long dry periods during the summer months but they do not like to get too hot - for this reason they can be planted to great effect below deciduous trees.

Shade is not essential and many of them grow perfectly well in the sun - indeed some do better with full exposure to the sun in our garden in northeast Scotland. They flower in March, peaking in April with a few continuing to flower in early May, a period when the sun is not too hot. The one thing that they do need shelter from is strong winds, which can rip through and shred their leaves very quickly.

Clumps should be split up every five years or when they stop flowering well. Take care when lifting them to dig deeply as they have a tendency to take themselves down into the soil.

The most difficult thing about growing erythroniums is getting hold of them in the first place – once you have them established in your garden they are relatively trouble free and very beautiful.

**Ian Young.**

## THE BEST CAMPANULA FOR ROCK GARDENS

Before a campanula can be designated ‘Queen of the Genus’ there are five aspects that must be considered:

1. size and colour of flower and flowering ability;
2. ability to withstand hot and dry periods, wet periods and severe frosts;
3. longevity in the garden and willingness to set viable seed;
4. non-invasive tendencies and small elegant shape; and
5. resistance to attacks by slugs.

Candidates from the Caucasus will not tolerate really hot and dry conditions as is the case with true alpine bellflowers from the Alps. Both groups are delicacies and magnets for molluscs of all descriptions. The Balkan and American species cannot compete.

**Graham Nicholls** has called *Campanula choruhensis* “one of the best campanula introductions in recent years”, but, in my opinion it is **the** best one because it gets top marks under the five aspects listed. Before I give you more details about cultivation and so on, I will tell the story of its introduction.

In summer 1992 a small party of Czech rock gardeners (**Jurasek, Pavelka and Halada**) crossed that magic bellflower triangle in NE Turkey (which is historically Armenia). They travelled in an old Romanian Dacia car driven by a Czech dentist who served also as cook. The poor old car was constantly overheating so they stopped for a rest at the bottom of a steep hill. When they climbed out of the car **Milan Halada**, observing the closest rock outcrops, saw an interesting white object. It was our campanula in her full oriental charm. No seed was available so they collected some living botanical samples (Milan, intelligently, pushed it into an empty can of Efes Pilsen beer). The following year another party (Czech-Canadian with **Jurasek, Holubec, Zvolanek and Joyce Carruthers**) stopped at the same locality, NE of Tortum. This lovely saxatile campanula was in seed and still showed some samples of its delicate white flowers. I was delighted too, to see some plants with red buds and pale rose-coloured flowers. The rock was volcanic; probably basalt, and most of the plants preferred an aspect out of the scorching Turkish sun, keeping themselves cool in crevices, but some brave ones were sunbathing near the base of the rock. On our return my seed was immediately posted to **Panayoti Kelaidis** in Colorado. **Josef Jurasek** and **Vojtěch Holubec** offered it in their catalogues that year.

This species is perennial - like *C. betulifolia* (I do not know why some 'experts' have considered and described the latter for forty years as a biennial). ***C. choruhensis*** is a member of a first class club –*Section Symphyandriiforme*- together with *C. troegerae*, *C. kirpicznikovii*, *C. seraglio* and *C. betulifolia*. They form nice compact tufts and are completely non-invasive. The main, central part of this species is the crown of the root system based on a few strong rock-drilling roots. The crown must be hardened in dry heat to be pretty woody. As I write (end of October) the crown is covered with a dozen tiny rosettes prepared for the spring rush. Leaves are not too variable, usually up to 5 cm but larger in good garden soil. They are hairy, cordate and serrate, but in full sun they are greyish in appearance. The blade is firm ("like tin" as Jurasek puts it) and not juicy for slugs.

The great variability is in the size and shape of the flowers. The smallest flowers are 35mm in diameter with more open bells and the medium ones are broadly tubular or campanulate, about 45mm in diameter. All plants have rich clusters of flowers and in cooler weather bloom for four weeks. In a hot and dry April they flower for about two weeks. The biggest flowers open into saucers up to 65 mm in diameter. They are close in shape, with erected style (what a symbol of Fertility!), to flowers of *Campanula troegerae*, which are practically flat. All of them have nicely coloured buds, from sugar rose to claret red. The rose flowers are lovely but most impressive are the huge white flowers resembling the 'White Rings of Purity', symbols of the prairie Indians. These divine flowers speak to me in some transcendental way, pushing me to worship them in a kind of secret cult. Frankly, this campanula, named after the river Çoruh in NE Turkey, when in flower reigns supreme over the inhabitants of my steep steppe crevice garden.

***C. choruhensis*** grows to perfection in the crevice garden of Joyce Carruthers in Vancouver Island where there are dry summers with mild and permanently wet winters. There it is happy in a partly shaded position, blooming throughout July. For cultivation in Irish conditions where you get rain all year round, the best place would be in a raised sand-bed covered with creviced stonework.

I grow them in local heavier (clayish) alkaline mineral soil, watering only pricked-out seedlings when they put out their first true leaves. Once they are established I never water them. This species can stand full sun between my volcanic rocks (diabase) during a month of scorching days when you cannot keep your palm on the heated surface of the stone. This nice baking and no artificial watering keep dangerous fungi and slugs at bay. I usually have three plants planted in a social group: it helps to boost the mood of the

individuals and encourages the setting of fertile seed. Seed is tiny (dust like) and when you have good amount of it, you can try to blow it from your open palm into a suitable site like **Harry Jans** does with his alpiners in Holland.

I like to tame wild alpiners with the help of the principle of the adaptation of an individual to different biological conditions of life. In a few generations of seedlings you will get a happy new society of choice campanulas colonizing your rock garden in their own way, usually seeding themselves into offered crevices. But to have them all in the best proportions you must discard all plants with smaller flowers and collect seed only from the strongest and most attractive mothers. I feel that **C. *choruhensis*** has exceptional inherited qualities and so is a very flexible species suitable for breeding and careful selection of the best performing individuals.

**Zdeněk Zvolánek**



## ***PLEIONE AURITA* AND HOW I GOT IT**

In 1994 I bought six pseudobulbs of *Pleione* 'Shantung' in a Dublin garden shop. Five of the pseudobulbs were round, and dark green to purple in colour, as those of 'Shantung' should be, but the sixth was conical and green and unfamiliar to me. I kept all six but planted the odd one in a separate pot. When the plants flowered the first five were clearly *P.* 'Shantung' but the last produced a large flower, pale pink to purple in colour with a central yellow stripe and was completely new to me. I was unable to identify the plant from my reference books but the following year I bought *The Genus Pleione* by Philip Cribb, curator of the orchid herbarium at Kew, and Ian Butterfield, a nurseryman who had won many gold medals at the Chelsea Flower Show for displays of this genus. On looking at the addendum to the book I saw that a Dr H. Pfennig from Germany sent six pleiones, some of them in flower, to Kew in 1988. When the plants were checked against herbarium material it was concluded that they belonged to a new species and were named *P. aurita*.

In April 1999 the joint committee of the RHS, the AGS and the SRGC (known as the 'Joint Rock') attended the Ulster Group's annual Show in Greenmount and I submitted my pleione to them for consideration. On the recommendation of the joint committee the RHS granted this beautiful species an Award of Merit and also a Certificate of Cultural Commendation.

### **Cultivation**

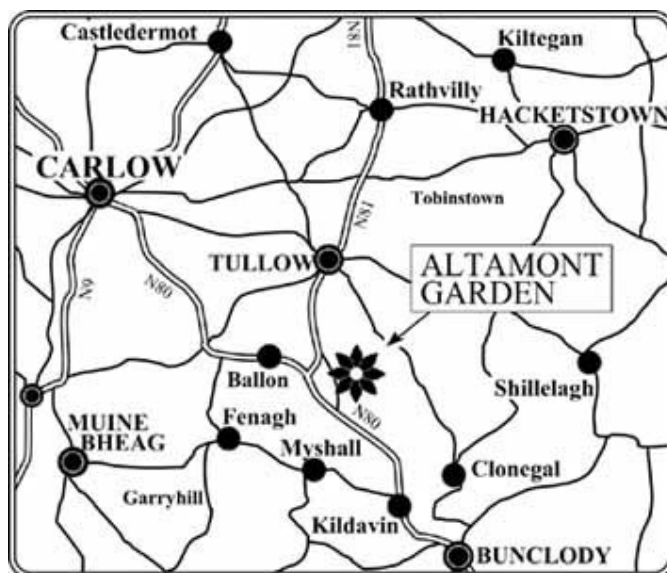
Standard methods for growing pleiones are very suitable for *P. aurita*. There are many different recipes given for pleione compost, but I'll give you mine. I use three parts of fine bark (most experts recommend orchid bark but I have never used it), one part granite grit or Perlite, one part chopped sphagnum moss, one part rotted beech leaves or sphagnum moss peat and one part well-rotted cow manure. In November when the leaves die back and the roots are dead, I knock the pseudobulbs out of their pots, clean them up and place them in paper bags. I store them in the fridge for the winter, always against my wife's wishes. I repot them in the above compost at the end of January. I water sparingly in the spring keeping the compost just moist. After flowering, once the plants are growing strongly, I increase the watering and feed them regularly throughout the summer.

**Liam Byrne**

*When Liam sent me his piece it was entitled *P. chunii*, as this was the name that Cribb and Butterfield had assigned to this plant in the book referred to in the article. In the*

course of correspondence that I was having with the Hardy Orchid Society ([www.hardyorchidsociety.org.uk](http://www.hardyorchidsociety.org.uk)) seeking permission to use a photograph of this plant from their website, I was referring to it as *P. chunii* formerly *aurita*. Maren Talbot, the proprietor of Heritage Orchids ([www.heritageorchids.co.uk](http://www.heritageorchids.co.uk)) and a committee member of the Society, kindly wrote to me pointing out that since the publication of the book there had been “further taxonomic development which put *aurita* back to where it came from and created a new species, *chunii*, which looks remarkably like *hookeriana*”. So Liam agrees that his plant is definitely now known as *P. aurita*, the name that he originally applied to it. My thanks to Ms Talbot and to the Hardy Orchid Society for this clarification and for permission to use their picture. Ed.

## ALTAMONT



### Location

Signposted on N80 and N81;  
9 km. from Tullow, 22 km. from Carlow town  
on the Bunclody road

## GROWING ALPINES FROM SEED

One of the greatest sources of satisfaction in growing alpine, or indeed any plants, is to be found by raising them from seed. The seed sowing process gives you access at little cost to a huge range of plants that would otherwise be largely unavailable and/or unaffordable. You will develop a familiarity with your plants that you would never get from just buying them. Spare plants will be available that you can try in different parts of the garden, or for swapping with other growers, giving to friends and to the Group's plant sales. Some gardeners are committed non-seed-sowers because they think the process is too difficult, or too time consuming, or too long term. This is not the case (although *some* work is required) as I hope to demonstrate in this article which is based on my own fumbling over more than thirty years, and also on the responses of a group of noted and successful practitioners who kindly answered a questionnaire that I circulated. I am most grateful to each and every one of them for their contributions and have listed them below.

### Getting the Seed

The most obvious source of seed is the AGS seed list which this year includes more than 5000 varieties. All applicants get twenty three packets, donors thirty, for a mere €8. In order to enable the seed distribution team to send you only seed that you want, you must apply for up to eighty four packets. You are asked to indicate your first twenty three or thirty choices, followed by fifty four alternatives. You will usually get a reasonable proportion of your first choices, and the substitutions will be seeds that you desire anyway. If you don't provide sufficient alternatives your allocation will be made up randomly.

How to choose? During the year you will have read or heard about desirable species, or have seen them in gardens you have visited, or on the show-bench. Keep a list of these plants and use it to make your selection. You can also go for particular genera. For example, having read Ian Young's article you might decide to apply for all the erythronium seed on the list. Some growers like to major on wild-collected seed, especially of *taxa* that are commonly misidentified in gardens, e. g., *Linaria alpina* or those, like aquilegias, which tend to hybridize in cultivation. It is a good idea to pick a few unfamiliar species each year. Also, ask for some rarities, but be prepared to be disappointed, as, by definition, they will be in short supply. You can opt for potential show plants, and for seed of plants you have lost and would like to try again. I would also include some bulbs each year because

they will take some years to reach flowering size, but, if you sow some annually, you will be surprised how quickly your collection will build up. Having made your selection, fill in and post the form, but keep the seed list as the packets will give numbers only, and you will have to write the plant names on them. I usually write the labels that I will put in the pots at the same time, putting on the name of the plant, the source of the seed, e. g., AGS 2007, the number of the item on the seed list, and, if wild collected, the location. I use flexible plastic labels and a HB pencil. If you put the list number and the year on the portion of the label that will be under the compost you will be able to identify your seedlings even if the writing on the exposed part should fade.

Other societies like the Scottish Rock Garden Club (SRGC), the Cyclamen Society and the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) have excellent seed lists but of course you must be a member. Seed can also be had from commercial suppliers – see the advertisements in the Bulletin – but at a cost. Seed should be sown as soon as possible after receipt.

### **Compost**

Seed composts must be open and free draining, but capable of holding moisture and air. I use equal parts of John Innes (JI) no. 2, grit and Perlite. Some growers use peat or multipurpose compost instead of Perlite, but I find the latter encourages better root development and, as it doesn't break down, ensures that the compost remains open, and it holds moisture well. If you use a lot of compost it is worthwhile asking your local garden centre to get in a large bag of Perlite for you, which will last for several years and is much cheaper than the smaller bags that are usually available. Among the other formulae that have been suggested are equal parts of JI 1 and grit; or of sieved leafmould and sandy grit; or good loam, leafmould and grit. If garden soil or leafmould are being used they must be sterilized, in my opinion, as otherwise you will get unwanted germination of weed seeds which may cause confusion. Any one of these mixtures will do perfectly well for most plants. For the higher alpine more grit can be used, and for ericaceous and woodlanders, increase the proportion of peat, or use fine Cambark if you can get it. For ferns, gesneriads and ericaceous species one grower uses finely chopped sterilized sphagnum on top of a mixture of loam and bark with a plastic cover to maintain moisture.

### **Sowing**

The square, rigid, black plastic 7 cm. pots that the Group has for sale to members is almost the almost universal choice of container. The pots must

be clean. Fill with compost so that when firmed the compost is within about 15 mm of the rim. To firm, tap the pot sharply on a hard surface and if necessary press lightly on the surface with your fingers – do not over firm. Some growers put a little Perlite in the base of the pot before filling with compost. Sow the seed thinly on the surface of the compost and top up to the rim with 3-6 mm grit. For very fine seed some growers use a shallow covering of silver sand, but I use grit for all seeds. Insert the label and stand the pot in water up to about halfway for fifteen minutes or so. When the compost is thoroughly moist place the pots in standard seed trays with drainage holes which will accommodate exactly fifteen of the 7 cm pots. Most growers leave their seed pots in a shaded position in the garden, but open to the elements. The garage roof was mentioned by one respondent (guess who), and another places the pots under the greenhouse staging. A north-facing cold frame is used by several. In these situations slug damage is less likely than in the open garden and the pots are easily protected from adverse weather conditions. Most growers use slug pellets to protect emerging seedlings from these pests. Netting can be used to keep birds from the pellets although there is a view that they are not attracted to them, and that they won't eat dead molluscs, "preferring their food on the hoof" as one respondent put it.

### **Aftercare**

The seed pots must never be allowed to dry out and you must be on constant guard against slugs. The topdressing of grit helps to prevent the growth of moss and liverwort but, because seeds of alpine can take up to several years to germinate, and because the pots are shaded, some of this unwelcome growth seems to be inevitable. If you are vigilant enough you can remove it at the early stages but once it gets established in a pot the game is over for those seeds. Most growers keep their pots for up to two years and some for longer, depending on the species.

### **Pricking Out**

Seedlings should be pricked out when they are large enough to handle. If they are left too long the roots will become entangled and the tiny plants will be almost impossible to separate. This job should not be undertaken in hot weather and, ideally, no later than the end of July. If left too late the seedlings will not have time to establish before the onset of winter. You will find that if the compost is on the dry side the seedlings will separate more easily. The compost used to pot up the seedlings should be similar in consistency to the seed compost, but with more nutrients – use JI 2 or 3 instead of JI 1, or incorporate a little bonemeal or slow-release fertilizer.

Carefully toss the entire contents of your seed pot onto a flat hard surface and separate the seedlings gently, taking care to minimize root damage. Put a layer of compost into a 7 cm. square pot and gently holding the seedling by its leaves – never by the stem – carefully fill in around the roots with the compost which should be dryish, settling the compost as you go by tapping the pot on your hard surface. Firm the compost very gently with your fingers around the little plant, leaving the surface up to about 7 mm from the rim, top up with grit, and immediately place the pot in a tray of water up to a little over half way for up to fifteen minutes. At this stage I don't label the individual plants (which are also kept in standard seed trays) but use the label from the seed pot to identify each group. The trays should then be placed in a shaded, sheltered place (under the greenhouse staging is ideal), leaving them there for at least ten days. The new plants are at their most vulnerable at this stage and must be cosseted. When they have recovered from their ordeal they can be placed outside, but not in full sun or exposed to very severe weather until they are fully established. Also you must continue to guard against pests and weeds. Pricking out of bulbs is best postponed for a year or two, but the seedlings, complete with their compost, can be transferred into a 9 cm. pot to encourage them to continue growing, but note what Ian Young has to say on the subject in his article on erythroniums. With bulbs especially, you should do everything you can to prolong the growing season, including feeding, thereby getting them to flowering stage in as short a time as possible. While they are growing strongly, other seedlings will also benefit from an occasional feed with half-strength tomato fertilizer.

Some seedlings such as *Gentiana verna*, and other species that resent root disturbance, are best pricked out in little clumps. The survival rate is higher and you will have a decent pot-full sooner.

When good germination occurs a decision has to be taken on the number of seedlings to be pricked out. Like many gardeners, I have an aversion to throwing out plants, but you have to be ruthless or you will end up with a garden centre rather than a garden. For ordinary species I now prick out six to ten plants but for something rare and difficult all seedlings are used.

### **Some Problems**

You will always find that a percentage of your seeds will not germinate. There are many possible explanations. Firstly, the seeds may not have been viable because they were handled incorrectly before being sent to the seed exchange. The excellent article by John Richards in the June 2006 Bulletin, No. 2/74 pp. 156-161, on collecting and storing seed from your garden deals

comprehensively with this topic. Also they may not be viable because they should have been sown fresh. Seed of most ranunculaceae, for example, fall into this category. Seed of some species is notoriously difficult to germinate and requires the use of gibberellic acid and other tactics to break dormancy, all of which is beyond the scope of this article and of the experience of this writer. Another possibility is that the seeds may have germinated but the new plants were eaten by molluscs before you noticed. Despite these setbacks, most of your seeds will germinate, most of your pricked-out plants will survive and your successes will more than compensate for your disappointments.

### **Record –keeping**

Some growers keep detailed records of their seed sowing activities. Statistics such as date of sowing, source of seed, date of germination, number of seedlings etc are recorded in a book, or in a computer database, which is linked to their labelling system and, after some years, will have accumulated a lot of useful information about the process. This type of record keeping requires discipline and will take time. If you think you have the discipline and can afford the time it should be worthwhile. I must confess that I have tried several times to set up a system but failed to persevere. Shame on me.

### **Conclusion**

Much more could be written on this subject but I hope I have covered the basics and that this article will encourage and be helpful to members who up to now have shied away from sowing seeds, and that even members who have been doing so will find something useful in it. I also hope that any reader who has any observations on it or further suggestions will get in touch. One piece of advice worth passing on is don't overdo it. If you sow too many seeds you will have problems when pricking out time arrives. Sow as much as you think you can handle and take good care of the progeny.

My sincere thanks are due to (in alphabetical order) **Liam Byrne, Raymond Copeland, Bob Gordon, Pat and George Gordon, Val Keegan, Dermot Kehoe, Harold McBride, William and Hilary McKelvey, Jim Price and George Sevastopulo** who generously took the time to complete the questionnaire. For reasons of space I was unable to include everything they mentioned and for this I apologise. Without their contributions this article would have been the poorer, but responsibility for any shortcomings is entirely mine.

**Billy Moore**



*Erythronium elegans* (Photo: Ian Young)



## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

### Cape Bulbs – Rod Saunders

**Rod Saunders** was for ten years the Manager of the nursery at Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens in Capetown in South Africa. An enviable job, one might think. But Rod found that he was dealing with paperwork rather than plants and, with his wife **Rachel**, he set up **Silverhill Seeds** – a company that supplies seeds of South African plants worldwide.

On 20 September, 2007 he and Rachel came to the National Botanic Gardens to talk about Cape Bulbs. He told us that the Cape area which comprises 4% of the area of South Africa is home to approximately 8,500 plant species. Roughly one half of the members of the *Iridaceae* family that grow on our planet are to be found here – the bulk of them in the Cape.

Many of the beautiful plants we saw were familiar to us but more were not. Like the deep pink coloured *Babiana ringens* where the stalk provides a convenient perch for the birds that pollinate the plant, or *Ferraria divercata* whose lurid colouring and smell of “stale feet” attract the carrion flies that disperse its pollen. Of the many gladiolus we saw, perhaps the most beautiful was *Gladiolus carmineus* – the Cliff Gladiolus – that grows within the sound of the surf and has open pink flowers. We heard that *Lachenalia viridiflora* with its astonishing turquoise flowers is in danger of extinction in its native habitat and the fields full of the white-flowered *Ornithogalum thyrsoides* were breathtaking.

Although all of the plants we saw are subject to periodic fires and can renew themselves afterwards – so much so that smoke is considered to be an aid to germination in some species - Rod Saunders spoke of the dangers to this wonderland of plants. If the fires are too frequent the habitats can be destroyed. He concluded his fascinating talk by hoping that all this would not be spoiled by a box of matches in the wrong hands.

**Carmel Duignan**

### Denver Botanical Gardens: Botanical Gem of Western America by Panayoti Kelaidis

The AGS undoubtedly has the best quality list of lecturers of any horticultural society in Ireland – a credit to **Martin Walsh**, the fixtures secretary. Panayoti Kelaidis is internationally known for his work at Denver

Botanic Gardens, initially in the rock garden and more recently as Director of Outreach. He has been responsible for introducing a vast range of native plants to horticulture in western North America. Martin did well to attract him to Dublin for this joint lecture with the Irish Garden Plant Society. On October 4 at the NBG Panayoti took us from Alaska to Mexico, with examples of the holarctic boreal, alpine, montane and steppe floras, and then paid a brief visit to the Botanic Garden and to his own garden in Denver. He showed us a range of plants, some familiar but the majority new to us, some growable in Dublin and others that would present a challenge. I particularly liked *Clematis fremontii*, a small, herbaceous clematis with grey-purple, urn-shaped flowers from the prairies of Kansas, and *Abronia fragrans*, the sand verbenas, a small shrub with balls of white scented flowers that might do very well for us in Dublin. The lecture was made more interesting by the liberal use of maps illustrating ecological factors that govern the distribution of plants in western North America. I left the lecture determined to do better with my North American plants

**George Sevastopulo**

## **A Walk in Autumn - Mount Usher Gardens**

I have always loved autumn, though it was slightly spoiled for me when in the first week back at school we had to write the annual essay 'A Walk in Autumn'. The editor seems to think I have been missing that exercise!

On the wonderful sunny afternoon of October 13 we started our visit, led by **Sean Heffernan**, the head gardener, standing on the bank of the Vartry River which runs through Mount Usher. Sean told us a little of the history of the gardens. We tried to concentrate despite being greatly distracted by a stunning *Nyssa sylvatica*, bedecked in all its fiery autumn finery, growing nearby in the company of a beautiful yellow *Pseudolarix*. The property was taken over in 1868 by **Mr Edward Walpole**, a Dublin businessman, who immediately set about planting a garden around the house. He was helped and advised by the leading horticulturists of the day, but it is nevertheless a very personal garden with a wonderful atmosphere and, despite being approximately 22 acres, has a very intimate feel. It is broken up into several distinct areas, but without any hard edges. One is led from one area into another by the ever more exciting specimens of trees and shrubs, or the several lovely bridges crossing the river and the wonderful views which just call one forward. Everywhere the trees are underplanted with layers of shrubs cascading down gracefully to the river or the croquet lawn and in

magnificent splendour around the house itself. The garden holds two NCCPG National Collections, *Eucryphia* and *Notofagus*, of which we saw many specimens.



Mount Usher Gardens (Photo: Val Keegan)

We walked along the south side of the river past a *Notofagus fusca* said to be the biggest in Ireland and on to a wonderful *Acer griseum* with its bark

positively gleaming in the autumn sun. There was a lot of ivy growing up the trunks of the old trees which Sean leaves in place to provide habitats for wildlife. When the ivy threatens to weigh the branches down he cuts its trunk near the base, making two cuts with a gap in between, otherwise it would seal up and continue to grow. There was a magnificent climbing hydrangea and a *Camellia* 'C.F. Coates' with its beautiful split leaf, *Luma apiculata*, a *Rathethamnus* with its blue berries and a *Magnolia cobus* which is apparently resplendent when it comes into bloom in late February/early March. Sean has planted three *Dicksonia serosa*, babies from the original plant in the garden, which he is watching and minding. We saw a magnificent specimen of *Philesia magellanica*, approximately 3 ft by 4/5 ft which is also layering at a great pace, and *Eucryphia moorei* in full bloom.

We wound on around through the eucalyptus collection, over a bridge and through the eucryphias catching wonderful views in every direction. We picked up colourful orange and cerise seeds of *Euonymus latifolius* to examine them. They were like miniature ball-gowns. Back to the river to see the most photographed view of the gardens with the river and several weirs carrying the eye onwards again. Sean took us aside to see a young *Iochroma* sporting one very beautiful blue hanging bell flower. He is hoping this will survive outside. We proceeded up the Palm walk towards the house (built in 1920) and along the stream past a couple of nice patches of Autumn crocus; on to the island where an observant member of the group spotted a *Primula capitata* in bloom. Here also there is a *Cornus controversa* planted in memory of George Byrne, gardener from 1921 to his death in 1971, and in a little sheltered shady clearing a *Lapageria rosea* climbed up and tumbled down again through an old Cordyline – a show stopper. We went on over the Pontoon bridge to see another stunning plant, *Enkianthus serulata*, and on through the herbaceous border. A wonderful walk and brought very much alive by the enthusiasm of Sean who talks passionately about the garden and its plants.

As the brochure states 'This isn't simply one of Ireland's finest gardens, Mount Usher is one of the world's most lovely examples of the Robinsonian style, with its free-flowing informality and natural design'. I hope it continues to develop in the same style. Its wonderful atmosphere is dependent on that.

If you didn't manage to visit the gardens in October put it in your diaries for spring or summer when it is equally beautiful.

**Rose Sevastopulo**

## Small is Beautiful by Val Keegan

On 8 November in place of the scheduled lecture by **Bob Gordon**, who due to illness had to cancel, Val stepped into the breach and gave us this absorbing talk which, in her words, was originally intended for the unconverted. It was, however, very enjoyable and informative and by no means basic or repetitive. The choice of plants was outstanding and so was the quality of the slides some of which were digital images and others scanned slides.

Val gently led us through her garden and the gardens of others, pointing out multiple ways of growing alpine and woodland plants, while stopping from time to time, as one would in a real garden, to admire individual plants and flowers and then stepping back to see the bigger picture. At the same time, she provided us with useful advice on where to grow these small plants, how to look after them, their ideal situation and growing medium. Other aspects such as garden evolution were also included.

We were shown perfect examples of plants, such as *Epimedium grandiflorum nanum*, *Geranium cinereum*, *Hepatica* and *Galanthus ssp.*, growing in woodland conditions. Some striking slides of *Narcissus romieuxii*, *N. bulbocodium* and the double yellow *N. 'Queen Anne'*, in particular, caught my attention.

Her original rockery, created in 1974, has grown in size and variety. Some plants, such as *Romulea australis*, are freely self-seeding. I also found interesting an unnamed gentian which never opens its flowers.

Val gave us a wealth of information on the versatility of troughs, illustrated by beautiful photographs. I admired with envy her collection of old stone troughs, which she acquired before they became the rage and were still affordable. She also showed the audience how it is possible to make good substitutes. She gave examples of troughs placed in full sun or in shade, crevice troughs such as the one created for the 21st Anniversary of the AGS Dublin Group, troughs for lime or acid-loving plants, one-theme troughs, such as her example of *Rhodohypoxis baurii*, troughs with plants carefully selected for staggered flowering or for an explosion of colour all at one time. She also showed how a mini alpine garden can be created in a suitable earthenware container.

Val's alpine house appeared packed with healthy, well-looked after plants, such as *Oxalis versicolor*. Here plants are grown in pots, and it is in pots that the final slides showed us alpines at their best, carefully selected and groomed for the AGS shows.

This was a well thought out, well presented lecture, in which Val demonstrated her talent as a gardener and a photographer, and showed the hallmark of a good teacher, namely, to make learning a smooth and pleasurable experience.

**Conchita Nolan**

*Bob is on the mend and he has our best wishes for a full and speedy recovery. I hope we will hear his talk on another occasion. Ed.*

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin

16 – 18 November



George Sevastopulo, Jim Archibald and Jānis Rukšāns at Termonfeckin.  
(Photo: Billy Moore)

Last year I wrote a glowing review of the 2006 weekend, thinking that it would be difficult to equal, the weekend, not the review. I am happy to report that 2007 was at least as good in every respect and better in some. This annual event was the brainchild of **Joan Carvill** almost a quarter of a century ago and this year Joan was still the principal organizer. Joan and the Committee and everyone else involved with the organization and running of the Weekend deserve the highest praise for their hard work.

All the lectures were superb, the atmosphere relaxed and friendly, the social side great fun and the food and accommodation excellent. The plant sales tables were a constant attraction. **Susan Tindall** and **Dr Keith Lever** of

**Aberconwy Nurseries** brought very few plants home. Our own plant stall sold out also with **Carmel Duignan** standing in for **Anna Nolan**, who was missed by us all and to whom everyone sent best wishes for a speedy recovery. **Margaret and Henry Taylor** brought free seeds for everyone. The experimental 'silent' auction, while offering less amusement than the 'normal' auctions of the past, raised a decent sum for the Group's coffers.

For the first time the event was overbooked with almost a hundred participants, leaving some applicants disappointed, a clear indication that the warning that early booking is essential needs to be taken seriously. The weekend is acquiring an international reputation with delegates from England, Scotland, Wales and the Czech Republic participating this year. Our overseas speakers next year will be **Robert Rolfe** from England and **Peter Korn** from Sweden both of whom come with the highest commendations. Indeed, as he seldom gives talks, this will be a rare opportunity to hear Robert, who was perhaps the most impressive speaker at the Prague Conference in May. Our local speaker has yet to be decided but you can be sure it will be someone who will not be eclipsed by the visitors. The booking-forms will go out in the summer mail-out, so when they arrive don't delay. You have been warned.

Our speakers this year were **Jim Archibald**, **Jānis Rukšāns** and **George Sevastopulo**. George gave us one talk and Jim and Jānis two each.

Jim opened proceedings with a splendid lecture which he titled 'On the Rocks'. He focused on scree and cliff dwelling plants from around the world. We visited New Zealand, North and South America, South Africa, Morocco, Spain, France, the western and eastern European Alps, the mountains of the Adriatic Coast, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Iran. His talk was a veritable *tour de force* and was peppered with detailed botanical, geographical and geological information. His slides of both plants and landscapes were excellent. The plants he discussed ranged from the easy ones such as *Rupicapnos africana* and *Sarcocapnos crassifolia* from Spain, to trickier subjects like *Dionysia diapiensifolia* from Iran and the lovely *Viola delphinantha* from Greece. I was particularly taken by *Aquilegia ottonis* from Greece which was new to me and I will be looking out for it in the seed lists.

Jim's second talk took us on a trip to the Andes, north to south. Again we got a wonderful exposition on the geology of the mountains, geographical information and of course detailed botanical information on the plants. Despite his credentials as one of the great plantsmen of our day, even Jim was unable to tell us how to grow some of the intractable genera of these mountains. Many growers have tried with little success and the mystery



remains as to why some plants from the region, such as *Alstroemeria*, *Mutisia*, *Tropaeolum* and *Fuchsia ssp.*, are perfectly growable while plants like the rosulate violas, argylas and others resist all attempts at cultivation. No doubt in time their secrets will be uncovered but, meanwhile, we have to content ourselves with the plants in the wild either in person, if we're lucky and adventurous enough, or through the lovely photos that travellers like Jim show us. These are plants that are desirable, not because they are difficult, but because they include some of the most beautiful alpine plants in the world. I would rate this talk from Jim as the best I have heard on Andean plants.

Jim, of course, with his wife Jenny, has been one of the most active seed collectors of his generation, and as those of you who have bought seed from him will know he only supplies material of the highest quality. He is a skilled presenter and the flow of facts that roll off his tongue without any slips is hugely impressive.

Jānis is well known to bulb growers all over the world through his highly successful bulb business which he runs from his native Latvia. He has also just published a very well received book, *Buried Treasures*, his fifth, which is subtitled 'Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs'. **Chris Brickell**, in his foreword to the book, describes him as "journalist, author, nationalist politician, plantsman, plant breeder, plant explorer, and eminent nurseryman". In his first talk on the bulbs of Central Asia Jānis certainly presented us with choice plants. The main genera covered were *Crocus*, *Fritillaria*, *Iris*, *Tulipa*, *Allium*, *Corydalis*, *Geranium* (tuberous) and *Colchicum*. Many of the photos of plants in the wild and in cultivation were quite breathtaking as testified by constant noises of appreciation from the audience. Unlike many of the South American plants these are all in cultivation and although some, like the Juno Irises, are far from easy, many are perfectly good garden plants provided they are given excellent drainage. Among the species that I found especially appealing were *Fritillaria eduardii*, *Iris stolonifera* 'Sina Dark', *I. wilmottiana* and *zenaidae*, *Tulipa vvedenskyi* (very late), the tiny *T. orthopoda*, *Allium brachyscapum* and *Eremurus cristatus*.

For his second presentation Jānis brought us behind the scenes at his nursery and took us through the various stages in the evolution of his business from the dark days of Soviet occupation up to the present which sees Latvia as part of the EU. He discussed the composts he uses, showed us his planting methods, his irrigation system, his seed sowing regime, how he harvests, records, cleans and stores his bulbs and his obsession with hygiene to ensure that his collection remains free of disease (I could take a cheap shot at the HSE here). He also went through the process of

increasing his stocks by scaling, where again strict hygiene was paramount. I found this a riveting talk, and was hugely impressed by the colossal amount of work involved and the energy and dedication the business demands and receives from Jānis. He employs some help nowadays, and given that a few days before he came to Ireland he had just returned from a three week trip to the USA, during which he gave thirty five talks, one can see why.

Finally, I come to George's presentation which was greatly enjoyed by the delegates. His title was 'Thirty Years a' Growing' and, although he meant growing plants, he attempted to forestall any snide personal comments from the audience by showing a thirty year old picture of himself: George is no longer lissom. Apart from the many humourous asides touching on his gardening relationship with Rose (they have separate beds) this was a talk that was full of sound advice about growing and propagating alpinists.

George makes the most of his relatively small garden by storing many pots on his garage roof and turning the kitchen window sill into a plunge bed. He demonstrated how his experiment of growing plants in pure crushed quartzite in a raised bed has proved very successful for some quite difficult alpinists. His plant of *Edraianthus pumilio* growing in these conditions was the best I've seen. We saw some great plants from George's list of 'bankers', including *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postil' and *Iris winogradowii*. Among his 'favourites' are *Galanthus* 'Mrs McNamara', named for Dylan Thomas' mother in law, and *Cyclamen purpurascens* which he grows very well. George propagates plants from seeds, cuttings and spores and told us about his methods. He had some sound advice on the difficult question of labelling, and described the automated, and reasonably priced, watering system he has installed for vulnerable plants, mainly to avoid fatalities while he and Rose are away. This interesting, practical talk delivered with great good humour closed with a list of what George called his '*desiderata*', plants that he would like to see thriving in his garden, and with *Ranunculus bilobus* amongst them, wouldn't we all.

Apart from the featured speakers there were informal, short presentations on Friday night by **Carl Dacus, Hester Forde, Joan and Liam McCaughey, Heather Smith, Mark Smyth and Zdeňek Zvolānek**, which by all accounts (I wasn't there) were of a high standard and enjoyed by all who were there.

I hope I have given those of you who were not in Termonfeckin some flavour of what was a most enjoyable weekend and encouraged you to think of attending in future. I am already looking forward to next year.

**Billy Moore**

## Turkish Delights by Carl Dacus

Our 2007 programme ended on an appropriate note with an entertaining account by Carl of an idyllic week he spent botanizing in south-western Turkey, cruising from place to place in a lovely six cabin ketch in the vicinity of Marmaris. This was a botanizing trip *sans* hardship, and would have much wider appeal than the usual camping and sloggish expeditions that we are used to hearing about. There seems to have been a fairly conspicuous consumption of food involved, judging by the many scenes we were shown of the boat's dining table, usually occupied. Carl, however, eschewed all of this frivolity because he didn't appear in any of these pictures. No doubt he was more interested in the great variety of fine plants that he and his party encountered. The trip was organized by **Alex Chisholm** and led by **Martin Rix**, who may be giving us a lecture soon, and took place in early April 2006.

Among the plants Carl showed were many bulbs as one would expect from this region in spring. We saw *Allium*, *Fritillaria*, *Muscari*, *Gladiolus*, *Ornithogalum*, *Iris*, *Gagea*, *Scilla* *ssp.* and more. *Cyclamen persicum* was plentiful as was *C. alpinum*. There were also many orchids with *Ophrys episcopalis* probably drawing most admiration.

The lovely *Ranunculus asiaticus* was in full flower and Carl saw many plants of *Onosma graeca*, which greatly appealed to him, and must be one of the most attractive members of the genus. But for the audience the image of the evening was of an olive grove carpeted with the brilliant red of *Papaver rhoeas*, a gorgeous scene.

Carl's presentation covered much more than plants. Turkey is, of course, rich in archaeological artefacts and the area being explored is not far from Bodrum, home of Herodotus, and site of the tomb of King Mausolus, once one of Pliny's Seven Wonders of the World. Carl showed us many old sites including a fine amphitheatre and a series of Lydian tombs set into a cliff face. We were introduced to some of the wildlife of the region in the form of tortoises, turtles, a range of insects and the occasional lizard. Some very handsome goats seemed to like the camera, but Carl bemoaned the damage that they were doing to the flora. His many shots of various rock formations were fascinating, but the main accolade must go to his pictures of the wonderful scenery both on land and sea that he and his companions journeyed through.

Truly, an assortment of Turkish delights that was enjoyed immensely by the large audience which afterwards also enjoyed excellent mince pies kindly supplied by **Val Keegan** and **Mary Glennon**.

**Billy Moore**

## FIXTURES

**Wednesday, 23 January, 8 pm.** AGM followed by **Paul Cutler**, ‘A Walk through Altamont’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Saturday, 9 February, 12.30 pm.** Lunch followed by **Peter Wyse-Jackson**, ‘Botanic Gardens of the World: Conserving Our Diverse Plant Heritage’. The Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire.

**Sunday, 10 February, 1.45 for 2 pm.** Garden visit to **Altamont** - €2 entry fee per person – see Map on p. 22.

**Thursday, 21 February, 8 pm.** **Jim Jermyn**, ‘The Challenge of Growing European Alpine Plants’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Thursday, 13 March, 8 pm.** **Martin Walsh**, ‘In Search of Tibetan Plants: Lhasa to the Gateway to Hell’. NBG, Glasnevin.

**Saturday, 15 March, 2 pm.** Local Show and cultivation forum. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Saturday, 5 April, 1 pm.** **Dublin AGS Show**, Cabinteely Community School.

**Thursday, 10 April, 8 pm.** **Ger Van Den Beuken**, ‘Growing High Alpines in the Lowlands’, St. Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Saturday, 26 April, Ulster Group AGS Show**, Greenmount, Co. Antrim.

**Wednesday, 14 May, 8 pm.** Joint with IGPS. **Tim Ingram**, ‘Sylvan Delights – the Smaller Woodland Plants’, NBG, Glasnevin.

**Saturday, 24 May** – Coach Trip to **Lissadell** in Co. Sligo.  
See booking documentation.

## **OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE**

**Chairman & Show Secretary:** Val Keegan  
**Hon. Secretary:** Joan Carvill  
**Hon. Treasurer:** Tessa Dagge  
**Fixtures Secretary:** Martin Walsh

**Committee:** Jamie Chambers  
Arthur Dagge  
Mary Glennon  
Michael Higgins  
Anne-Marie Keoghan

## NOTES



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