



# **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**

## **Dublin Group**



**NEWSLETTER NO. 64 – SUMMER 2015**

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Front cover illustration is of *Draba longisiliqua* - see p. 12. (Photo: Billy Moore)

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## EDITORIAL

I am very pleased to report that the worrying decline in membership numbers over recent years has been reversed dramatically. Our membership now stands at 143, the highest it has been for at least a decade. I can only speculate on the causes of this most welcome development, and express the hope that it will become a trend.

We know that we got six new members directly from our exhibit at Bloom in 2014, but it is likely that some of the other joiners were influenced by our presence there also. We got eight members at the main Show, which has always been our main source of joiners, and the remainder joined randomly during the year mostly through the website. Jamie writes about the interest in our website and Facebook page on p. 6, and undoubtedly both play a part. We should follow Jamie's advice and make more use of the Facebook page. I am also aware that promotional activity by existing members has produced positive results. I would like to pay a tribute here to our former Secretary, Mary O'Neill Byrne, who, it is safe to say, recruited more members than any other single person in the history of the Group. We must all follow Mary's good example and avail of every opportunity to promote alpines, firstly, and the membership, secondly, to those of our families, friends, neighbours and acquaintances who are interested in gardening. Growing our membership will always be vital to the long-term survival of the Group and, despite our recent success, we cannot afford to be complacent.

Jamie tentatively uses the word 'marketing' in his piece, and that is exactly what we must continue to do to keep the numbers up.

Opportunities like Bloom will crop up from time to time and should be availed of where possible. But our main marketing resources are: the Show; the website; our Facebook page; and ourselves, and if we make the most of these we will get results.

## **ALPINE MISCELLANY**

The first half of our 2015 programme has gone very well. Most memorable for me were our visits to four outstanding gardens, two in north Co. Dublin and Co. Kildare at snowdrop time, and two in Northern Ireland in May. If you weren't on these trips you can read about them in the Review section.

The two shows in Cabinteely and Greenmount were of a very high standard and again there are full accounts of those, starting on p. 12.

Our lectures were very well received also and you can get a flavour of all of them below. As usual my thanks to all the reporters for their excellent contributions with a special thanks to Catherine McCarthy, who is a new member, for her spot-on account of Rob Potterton's talk. I must also mention Stephen Butler of the IGPS who agreed to share with us his superb report on Seamus O'Brien's great talk. Stephen and I agreed a sensible, reciprocal arrangement whereby for every other joint lecture someone from either society would do the report. Our turn next in October, when one of our members will do a report on Susan Band's talk which will appear in the newsletters of both societies. I expect a queue of volunteers.

### **Loughborough Show**

I have made brief references in past newsletters about the custom that Liam Byrne, George Sevastopulo and I have established of visiting shows in England to see how things are managed over there, and to compare the standard of exhibits there with those at our shows. Our conclusion has been that while most of the shows across the water are bigger than ours, and are supported by a large number of 'travelling' top exhibitors, the general standard of plants on the Irish benches is quite high, but there are more 'stunners' on the benches in England. We have found these visits valuable on a number of fronts: we see new plants; we make new contacts and renew old ones; we get to talk to the top exhibitors; we are usually asked to join the judges, thereby getting new insights into the judging process; and we may even acquire a plant or two.



This year we visited the Loughborough show on 7 March, on this occasion accompanied by Paddy Smith, who, as Fixtures Secretary, found the exercise useful from the point of view of sourcing new speakers for our lecture programme. As this show is so much earlier than the Irish shows the range of plants on the benches was quite different to what we are accustomed to. Dionysias, narcissus, crocuses, iris, corydalis, cyclamen, galanthus, saxifrages, and eranthis were prominent. To my eye the last were a revelation and below is a photo of just one of the many large pots full of eranthis that adorned the benches. Somewhat controversially, the Farrer Medal went to a pristine exhibit of *Narcissus* 'Mitzy'. It was lovely with many flowers and faultlessly presented, but we felt that there were more deserving candidates for the top award.

Loughborough 2015 was a fine show and reinforced our determination to continue these annual crossings of the Irish Sea as long as we can.



*Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold' at the Loughborough Show. (Photo: Billy Moore)

## **Website and Facebook page**, from Jamie Chambers

Hard to believe, I know, but social media has come to the AGS: we now have 683 Likes for our Facebook page (and eight alone in the week I'm writing). There is now a regular stream of people finding us on Facebook and Liking what they see. Quite often we are Liked by other groups' pages, such as the Scottish Rock Garden Society (742 Likes), or Terra Nova Gardens (1,087 Likes) - there are sixty of these at present - and this helps us get in front of their followers too. We get quite a few overseas Likers - people from Egypt, Iran, Japan and Brazil have visited us recently - but mostly they are from Ireland. There are bursts of activity which show how people come to the page for events they are really interested in, such as Seamus O'Brien's talk in March. I think this is wonderful. We are interacting with people in ways that were impossible only a few years ago.

Now, let's not get carried away with our own popularity - after all, to put it in perspective, Van Morrison has 1.2 million Likes! - but, I think this shows how, through our Facebook page, people can find out about us, and maybe even start to take part in what we do. It seems overly serious to refer to this as 'marketing', but we do need to find ways of getting in front of people, making ourselves easy to find, and enabling followers to interact with us. Our Facebook page is the ideal way to do that, backed up by the website, which is more informative. I think it's no surprise after our impressive presence at Bloom last year that our membership has increased, but all that effort would be wasted if there weren't easy ways for those who saw the Postcard Garden to find out more about us.

You can help! This is all about activity: posting photographs to our page is one good way of getting people's attention, so think about putting up a photo occasionally, from your garden, or from a trip you've made. Let me know if there are events that you think our members would like to hear about so I can link to them from our own page. Or websites you think they should take a look at. This is all activity on our page that gets us in front of more people, more visitors to the Show, and ultimately more members.

Best way to look at our page is to go to the website (<http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie>) and click on the link at the bottom of the menu on the left, or go directly to Facebook and search for Alpine Garden Society Ireland.

### **Show Update**, from Gavin Moore

It's never too early to start preparing for the 2016 show. Now is when you can really make the difference with show plants. Plants treated well during their growing season will have the best chance of winning prizes next spring. Here are some things you can be doing now to increase your chances of winning a red sticker.

#### Watering

It sounds obvious but watering is the most important thing you need to do in the summer. Although it is possible for plants to get by with irregular watering, drying out completely will set the plants back and in some cases damage them beyond short-term repair. Good examples of this are saxifrages. Many saxifrages will not tolerate strong sunlight unless they are well watered. Plants that are dry will get scorched and possibly die in strong sunshine, whereas if they are well watered they will deal with the conditions much better. Many cushion plants will also get dead patches if let dry out rendering them unshowable next year. Of course, plants in pots are especially susceptible. If possible keep plants plunged either in a frame (covered or uncovered) or even plunged in the open garden. This will keep roots at a relatively even temperature and with consistent moisture levels.

#### Re-potting

Show plants really need to be re-potted at least once each year, sometimes twice or three times if growing strongly. It is worthwhile keeping plants in an appropriate sized pot. For those of you showing in the Novice Section, if you have a plant that needs moving on because it's growing well why not take the plunge in 2016 and enter it in the Intermediate Section in a larger pot. It may be tempting to keep it in a smaller pot to fit the section, but the plant is unlikely to thrive. For slow growing plants that do not need a bigger pot, it is still worthwhile taking

it out of its pot, removing some old compost replacing it with some fresh material.

## Bulbs

In just a few weeks the bulbs will be back in the garden centres and catalogues. Make the decision now to buy some bulbs to show next year. It is the simplest possible way to acquire a plant for showing. There are many sources of bulbs including online sites. Do some reading, ask some questions and be ready in late August when the bulbs arrive. For those of you who bought bulbs last year, it will soon be time to toss them out of their pots to see how they have increased and re-pot them for next year. I'll be sending more information on that later in the summer.

Finally, if you want to exhibit in any of the shows next year, now is the time to make the decision and start preparing. There are nine months to acquire plants and bulbs that will be ready for showing. If you are new to showing and don't know where to start, please contact me directly (086 823 5919). There are several very experienced exhibitors in the group, all of whom will be more than willing to be your 'show mentor'. Once you exhibit once, you'll be hooked.

## Fixtures

On Thursday, 15 October at the NBG, Glasnevin, **Susan Band** will talk to us about 'Growing lilies and their relatives in Scotland'. Susan runs Pitcairn Alpines ([www.pitcairnalpines.co.uk](http://www.pitcairnalpines.co.uk)), which specializes in choice bulbs and sells by mail order. A workshop that she gave at Termonfeckin some years ago on growing and propagating bulbs was very well received. You can read an account of her presentation on p. 34 of Newsletter no. 53. The bulbs are grown at the nursery in natural conditions and are of excellent quality. She will be bringing some for sale. This is a joint lecture with the **IGPS**.

At St Brigid's on 12 November, **Frank Lavery** will tell us all about 'Plants of the Algarve'. This is the first time that we will have a talk on the flora of this region. Frank spends a lot of time in Portugal and so is very familiar with its plants. I know that he has worked very hard on this



talk and as a fellow member we owe him a good turnout. I am looking forward to it.

Our **32nd Alpine Weekend** takes place at Termonfeckin from 20 to 22 November. As always we have a great line-up with **Carole** and **Ian Bainbridge** from Scotland; **Joan** and **Liam McCaughey** from Northern Ireland; and **Janis Ruksans** from Latvia. Aberconwy and Timpany Nurseries will have plants for sale. Full details of the programme and the speakers along with a booking form are included in your mail-out. We are expecting a sell-out this year so book early.

We end the year as usual with our **Christmas Miscellany** at St Brigid's, an event that is always enjoyable and convivial. Jamie will be in touch nearer the date looking for contributors, so if you are doing any plant-related travel, or visiting any nice gardens in the meantime, take some pictures and share them with us on 10 December.

**Billy Moore**

The photo below is of the Bloom raised bed planted up in my garden. I bought the structure from the Society.



## ***Pulsatilla vulgaris* (Ranunculaceae)**

For me *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, the Pasque Flower, is one of the top spring-flowering alpinines. It is really easy to grow, either in the garden or in a pot. It thrives in a sunny spot in my limey soil. Its soft, finely dissected leaves die back in autumn and reappear in April, followed by the hairy cup-shaped flowers through April and May. The flowers are predominantly violet/purple but can vary in colour from various shades of purple and red to pure white, and are carried on six to nine inch stems. These plants are lovely in flower but it doesn't end there because the fluffy silver seed heads (pictured) are very decorative in their own right, lasting for up to four weeks. Backlit by the sun they are a sight to behold.

I have grown the various colours all of which I like, but I think my favourite is the white form, *P. vulgaris* 'Alba'. There is a touch of silver in the green leaves and the nodding white flowers are beautiful. I grow it in the garden but also in a pot, as it is an excellent show plant and one very suitable for beginners. It grows happily in a mixture of equal parts of



leafmould, garden loam and grit. Unless the loam is alkaline the addition of a little lime to the compost will be beneficial. Peat or composted bark can be substituted for the leafmould. Water freely during the growing season and keep just moist through winter. Like all members of Ranunculaceae it will benefit from a couple of feeds with tomato fertilizer after flowering. It is easily raised from seed.

If you intend to exhibit pulsatillas they must be grown in pots, as with their long taproots they will not tolerate being lifted from the garden. I learned this lesson years ago with a related species, the legendary *P. grandis* 'Budapest'. Although, as it is doubtful if the original 'Budapest' is still in cultivation, it would be more correct for me to refer to my plant





as a 'Budapest Seedling'. It had lovely ice-blue hairy flowers and I used to think it was the nicest plant in my garden when it was in flower. It survived for many years and was always much admired by my gardening friends, so much so that I decided to lift it to take some root

cuttings. I have to admit that I've never had much success with propagating by root cuttings and so it was on this occasion. The cuttings failed and, sad to say, my 'Budapest' died. So, be warned, if you have a nice pulsatilla growing in your garden enjoy it there and don't be tempted to lift it for a show.

**Liam Byrne**

## THE SHOWS

### Dublin Group AGS Show, 11 April

I arrived at the Dublin Show when staging was in full swing, my host having left with his own plants an hour earlier. A few steps inside the door and I had been greeted and shaken by the hand several times, the usual warm Irish welcome. The new show Secretary, Gavin Moore, was presiding over the process with all the poise of a veteran, calmly answering questions from exhibitors as well as staging his own plants.

It was particularly pleasing to see the Farrer Memorial Medal for the best plant in the show being awarded to Val Keegan, who was herself the Show Secretary here for many years. The plant was a large and particularly well-flowered *Draba longisilqua* (front cover). It had been grown for five years in a gritty compost, and had been given occasional feeds of tomato fertilizer as well as occasional dressings of blood, fish and bone. This species from the Caucasus resents humidity, which can result in the downy leaves being attacked by mildew. Val also received a Certificate of Merit for a pot of *Ipheion* 'Alberto Castillo' (back cover), a very good garden plant that can flower for three weeks or more, in this case belying its slightly untidy nature in the garden and standing up proudly in the pot.

As I had the national show records on my laptop, I was able to process the show results after judging and tell Gavin that he had just won his Gold Medal. He had no idea that he had been so close to this achievement. One of his exhibits that caught the eye was an entry in the class for three pans rock plants with silver/grey foliage. Very often, there is heated debate between judges about whether the foliage of all three plants meets the requirements of the class, but not so in this case. His *Raoulia australis*, *Pterocephalus spathulatus* and *Convolvulus boissieri*, were all silver and glistened with good health. Like most silver-leaved plants, these had been given the protection of an alpine house to keep the leaves in immaculate condition.

There is always strong support for this show by exhibitors from Northern Ireland and this year was no exception. The Waverley Trophy for the best plant in the Intermediate Section was awarded to *Soldanella*

'Sudden Spring' exhibited by Joan and Liam McCaughey. This hybrid between *S. carpatica* and a hybrid of *S. pusilla* is more vigorous than either parent and flowers far more generously than the latter. It needs a moist well-drained soil in sun until after flowering, light shade thereafter.

Another exhibitor from Ulster, Harold McBride, can always be relied upon to bring some interesting plants to the show. The first of his plants to catch this reporter's eye was the diminutive *Meconopsis integrifolia* subsp. *lijanensis* (or possibly *M. integrifolia* subsp. *soulieri*), received in 1993 from Stella and David Rankin as a seedling raised by them, and grown on to flowering size by Harold. The seed had been collected from a population

in SW Sichuan at 3500m on open hillsides, among grass and rocks. To quote the Rankins: 'Cultivation is as for other *integrifolia* types - well drained, moist, plenty of feeding, and prayer morning and night. And even then nothing is guaranteed'.



Another of Harold's plants, *Erythronium revolutum* 'Waverley Stargazer' was awarded a Certificate of Merit. This unusual variant, first exhibited at the Ulster Show in 2014, was selected by Harold from his own seedlings and has upwards-facing flowers that obviate the need to get down on hands and knees or to turn the flowers over by hand in order to admire the details. This species does not normally increase readily by division, and flowering is anxiously awaited of several seedlings from this plant to see if the stargazing habit has been inherited.



One of the oldest exhibitors at the show, Liam Byrne, was delighted, in his eightieth year, to have won the trophy for the most first prize points in the



Open Section. Among his many plants, his entry in the class for one large pan cushion plant was nudging the maximum pot size. *Gypsophila aretioides* 'Caucasica' (above) is often seen at our shows but seldom, if ever, as big or as good as this. Liam had been growing this plant for over twenty-five years and there was no trace of yellow foliage or of any 'burn off'. The plant is sprayed two or three times a day in hot weather and had been soaked occasionally. Its days as a show plant are numbered as it is becoming too heavy to lift!

We can always expect to see excellent Trilliums at the shows in Ireland.



Notable at this show were Gordon Toner's *Trillium chloropetalum* (above) (which won the Margaret Orsi bowl for the best plant from



North America) and Billy Moore's striking yellow-flowered plant of the same species, *T. 'Bob Gordon'*, which was written up by Billy himself in the Ulster Show Report for 2014, and was given an RHS Award of Merit by the Joint Rock Committee meeting at the same show.

In the Novice Section, Janet Wynne won the Millennium Cup for the best plant in that Section with *Trillium rivale*. This three/four year old plant occupied a deep pot to accommodate its long roots. While top-dressed with bark, it was actually growing in a mix of JI3, grit and leafmould (Janet makes her own from beech leaves).

I am pleased to be able to finish this report with a mention of my host from the night before, Frank Lavery, who won the Barney Johnson Trophy for the most first prize points in the Intermediate Section. Notable among his plants was a lovely pan of *Pleione 'Tongarino'* grex (below) which had been carefully built up over several years.



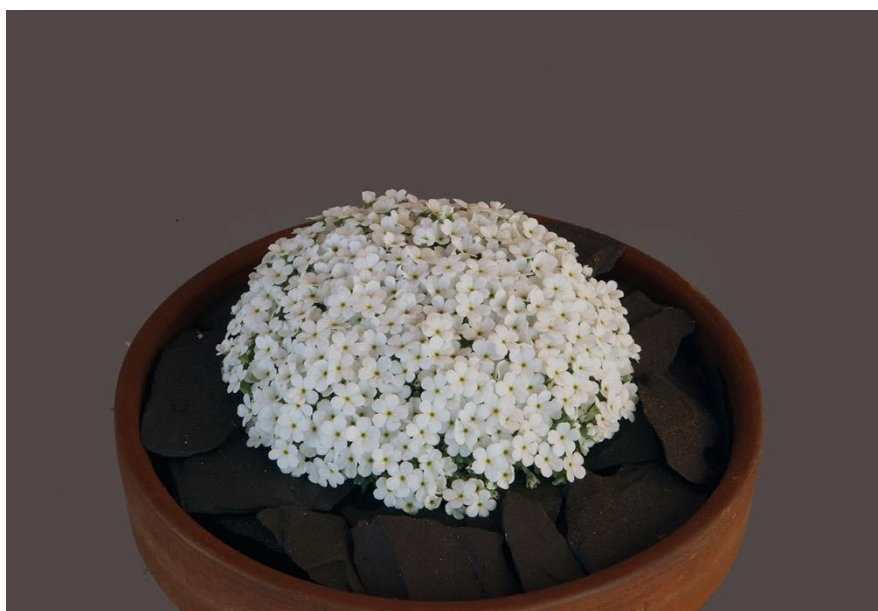
Text: Jim McGregor

Photos: Billy Moore

## Ulster Group AGS Show, 25 April

Those of us who have been attending AGS shows for years can sometimes forget the impact a good show can have on a first time visitor. I thought of this in Greenmount when I looked at the exceptional display on the benches at this year's Ulster Show. The fact that there were eight candidates for best plant says it all. It reminded me of the sense, almost of awe, that I felt many years ago when I attended my first AGS show in Belfast. It reminded me also that the annual show is the local AGS group's shop window, and the prime opportunity to recruit new members. In the Dublin Group most of our new members join either at, or shortly after, the show. This highlights the importance of the shows for the future health of the society, and the need to maximize their potential to attract new members.

Laurence Kane, who was awarded the trophy for the best plant in flower in the



novice section, took up gardening only three and a half years ago, and, influenced by what he saw on the benches, joined the AGS. His winning plant was an excellent *Androsace vandellii*, (above) which would not have been out of place in the Open Section. All AGS groups need to attract more Laurence Kanes.

As usual thanks to Pat Crossley and her team who got everything right, and to Don Peace, whose calm and efficient direction (with the able assistance of George Sevastopulo whenever one of Don's plants was in contention) the judging went smoothly. Exhibitors from the Ulster and Dublin groups were joined by Don from England, and Ian Leslie from

Wales, both of whom were most welcome and made no small contribution to the excellence of the show.



The Farrer Medal went to Paddy Smith's superb specimen of *Gentiana acaulis*, (above) repeating his success at the Dublin show in 2014 when his large pan of *G. verna* got the top award. Paddy obviously has a way with gentians, as he had no less than twelve on the bench, some *G. verna*, including the white form, some *G. acaulis*, some in 19cm pots, others in larger, all grown from seed and all potential award plants. Is this a record? He makes his own compost with the heavy, neutral loam in his garden, using the John Innes formula but substituting Vitax Q4 as the fertilizer. For his gentians he mixes one part of the compost with one of leafmould and two of grit, adding a little lime for *G. verna*. The plants are grown in plastic pots that are kept outside at all times, are never allowed to dry out, and the roots are kept cool in summer by double potting. Paddy also got an award of merit for one of his pots of *G. verna*.

The award for the best plant in the intermediate section was given to Kay McDowell's *Saxifraga pubescens* 'Snowcap'. Like Paddy, Kay makes up her own mix consisting of garden soil, Perlite, garden compost and



some slow release fertilizer. The plant is six or seven years old and lives in a cold frame.

Harold McBride won an AGS Medal for his fine entry in the large six pan class. An award of merit went to one of the constituent plants, the imposing *Ranunculus cortusifolius*, native to the Canary and Azores islands, naturalized in California, and known as the Giant Buttercup. Harold grew it from seed and keeps it in the alpine house in a deep pot in a humus rich, free-draining compost, giving it occasional liquid feeds and plenty of moisture while in growth. Aphids can be a problem.



The award for the best ericaceous plant was given to Susan Tindall's impeccable *Cassiope* 'Snowbird', (above) a cultivar raised by Mike and Polly Stone. Susan finds it an easy grower, keeps it in a tunnel in a standard ericaceous compost, ensuring that it never dries out. Cilla Dodd's exhibit of the same plant, which she calls *Cassiope* 'Askival Snowbird', was judged the best ericaceous plant in the novice section. There were fewer ericaceous plants on the benches this year than is usual in Ulster.

The best plant from Australasia was *Anisotome imbricata* from Don Peace, one of two which he exhibited. Don grew them from the same batch of

seed obtained from a New Zealand supplier and sown in 2006. They were quite different in appearance, one very tight with tiny olive green rosettes (my favourite), the winner a richer green with slightly larger rosettes. They are grown in a gritty ericaceous mix and are very slow. The flowers are rather drab. Don also showed several specimens of *Androsace vandellii*, the largest being judged best plant in a pan not exceeding 19cm. He follows Geoff Rollinson's growing regime, using a compost consisting of one part leafmould and two parts grit. He recommends standing the pot in water for half an hour in early January to prevent any flowers aborting. The pots are plunged in shade in the alpine house. The plants are repotted yearly when small, but later are kept in a 19cm pot for as long as possible and given an occasional feed of Chempak no. 8.



A certificate of merit was awarded to Don for a very large pan of a fifteen - year old *Cystopteris dickeana*, every frond a pristine, bright, fresh green. It germinated fortuitously in the plunge in his alpine house and grows in a recycled gritty mix (formerly used for fritillarias), is fed occasionally, kept in the alpine house but goes outside in suitable weather. It is cut back completely in January.

For the record the award for most first prizes in the open section was won by Don; in the intermediate section by Frank Lavery; and in the novice section by Elizabeth Ross.

Two plants shown by your reporter received certificates of merit. One was a large pan of *Calceolaria* 'Walter Shrimpton'. This is not particularly difficult, but is utterly unforgiving if allowed to become infested by aphids or to dry out. I find that it benefits from copious watering when growing and flowering. The other was a mature potful of *Pulsatilla albana lutea* (above) grown from seed sown in 2009. It has been in the same clay pot for four years, is kept outside all year, and given a feed of tomato fertilizer after flowering.

The gentian relative, *Sebaea thomasi* is a plant of which I am fond but find difficult to keep in good condition when it gets large. Tim Lever of Aberconwy Nursery has mastered this species, not only winning a Farrer Medal both this year and last, but also growing a large specimen on the crevice bed at the family nursery. Hugh McAlister of the Ulster Group, however, grows this plant very well too, and got a well-deserved red sticker for his exhibit. Hugh keeps his plant outside except in the severest weather.

Joan and Liam McCaughey once again dominated the photographic section, as they do at so many shows, and with fifteen first points took home the John McWhirter Award.

In Ireland the two shows in Ulster and in Dublin are held in April so there is always a certain sadness when the later one closes, as we have to wait a year for the next. There is some consolation to be had for exhibitors from the fact that with the show season over we can attend to our gardens, and perhaps, taking on board the lessons learned from the current year's shows, think about potential candidates for the bench next year.

Text: Billy Moore

Photos: Heather Smith



## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

### **'Chinese and Himalayan plants for the Irish garden', Martin Walsh, 15 January**

In mid-January, on the night that Storm Rachel was finally winding down, the lecture theatre in the National Botanic Gardens filled up with plenty of gardeners and plant enthusiasts, all delighted at the opportunity to soak up an equal mix of erudition and enthusiasm from Martin, a designer, plant hunter and plant expert. The lecture was organized jointly by the Dublin AGS Group and the IGPS.

During the talk we were treated not just to Martin's experience and expertise, but also to his breath-taking photos - taken in Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Yunnan Province (SW China). Martin has been plant-hunting in all these regions and enjoys putting what he learns about the plants in their native habitats into use in his own garden and those he makes for others. On the night of this talk, however, Martin remarked that his task was to persuade us of the value of using plants from the Himalaya and China in Irish gardens. This was probably an easy enough task, given his



audience on the night, but I know that for me the huge value was to hear about which plants in particular do well, which are easy to grow, and which might be more difficult in our gardens. That 'difficult' category wouldn't be for me but there were plenty of expert growers in the Bots that night who'd relish the challenge of taking on some of the trickier plants.

Martin opened his talk with wonderful photographs of the landscapes in which he has travelled in search of the plants he loves. He then paid his respects, so to speak, to some of the plant hunters who preceded him (e.g. Ernest Wilson, Augustine Henry, Robert Fortune, Père Delavay, Frank Kingdon-Ward, Joseph Dalton Hooker).

After that, Martin got down to the plants, dividing his talk into descriptions of conifers, other trees, shrubs, woodland plants, ferns, bulbs, perennials and alpine. What a selection!

Some of the plants that stood out for me were *Paris polyphylla*, *Arisaema consanguineum* (which Martin says is a good arisaema to start with, and easy to grow from seed) and *Maianthemum oleraceum* var. *acuminatum* (formerly *Smilacina*). The 'Alba' form of *Roscoeia humeana* is gorgeous and a very graceful *Streptopus simplex* was new to me. One of the difficulties with persuading Irish gardeners to incorporate woodland habitats into their gardens is the perception that there's not a lot that goes on after the glories of spring. But Martin pointed out that there are plenty of plants that can keep the interest going for a good bit longer, for example the afore-mentioned, gorgeous *P. polyphylla* doesn't emerge until about June, but then continues into October. Martin also recommended *Podophyllum hexandrum* as being very suitable for a woodland setting and it too is apparently easy to grow from seed. You don't need a huge garden and lots of trees to grow many of these plants – a north-facing patch will provide many of the conditions of a woodland.

There were many other plants described by Martin on the night, far too numerous to describe here, but I'd imagine quite a few of them have made it onto many gardeners' wish lists. *Anemone rupicola* 'Wild Swan', *Paraquilegia anemonoides*, *Primula sikkimensis*, *Primula alpicola* var. *alba*, and *Corydalis* 'Wildside Blue' have all made it onto mine.

**Fionnuala Broughan**

## **Workshop on plant photography, Bernard van Giessen, 22 January**

Bernard van Giessen's career as a photographer started in his native Holland in the late seventies. He moved to Ireland some fifteen years ago.

He believes that the key to photography is to understand light and that there is an optimum light for every subject. For example, a blue sky with interesting cloud formations is great for an overview of a garden. Fog is

good for creating atmosphere but dawn is best: the light is soft, warm and flattering and there is less pollution and dust, which typically builds up as the day progresses.

A 24-28 mm wide-angle lens can be used for overviews. For close-ups it is best to use a dedicated macro lens. Compact cameras are well placed for close-ups thanks to their smaller sensor. The smallest amount of movement by either you, or the flower, will result in a blurred image and, the closer you get to your subject, the less **depth of field** (front to back sharpness) there is. You may want to invest in a good tripod, beanbags and a mat to lie on. Try potting up a flower and shoot it in the greenhouse. You will be assured excellent natural - preferably overcast- light and no wind.

Any photo will look better if you visualise an image before you click. You need to **plan** to make that happen; consider light, color, contrast, line, form, pattern etc. Bernard recommends developing a routine for every step of the process. He often spends more time looking and planning the shot than he does clicking. It's a high yield investment in time management; his images are memorable because of it.

If you'd like a copy of Bernard's handout *Tips for Taking Better Photos* email him at **bernard@catchlight.ie** and log on to **www.catchlight.ie** to see more of his inspiring work.



**Koraley Northen**

## 'Blooming postcard Garden - its conception to completion', George Sevastopulo, 7 February

A break with tradition had us all enjoying George Sevastopulo's lecture BEFORE our delicious lunch. A change that seemed to meet with everyone's approval.

George gave a most interesting talk on the background to the AGS Post Card Garden display at Bloom 2014. Although we all knew it involved a lot of work, not until after his talk did we realize exactly how much and I suspect we had the shortened version.

The Bloom subcommittee had their first meeting on 20 January 2014 where they decided the focus of the garden should be "Alpines are for Everyone". With that in mind, Martin Walsh designed the garden while the rest of the team filled in the very detailed entry form, sent in the plant list (which bore little resemblance to the end product) and noted the **many** constraints set by Bloom - notably only 12 hours to build the garden, no holes to be dug NOR any vehicles allowed on-site.



Members of the team travelled to the UK en route to an AGS Show and acquired many of the alpines from Aberconwy Nurseries. Anti-disaster measures required overstocking plants, which of course then had to be stored and kept alive. The hunt for a chair eventually ended in Roscommon, thanks to Martin. George even made a wooden frame for the crevice bed. Ingenious and should be patented.

The day of the setup was **mayhem**. Unanticipated problems included:

- Heavy rain resulting in very muddy ground requiring gravel and bark to form a foundation. Thank Goodness for contacts!

- Lots of strength needed for all the lifting and laying of flagstones; great team but with combined ages of 350yrs – muscle and youth next time (next time?!).
- Sequencing- certain jobs had to be done before others. Minimal opportunity for parallel processing.

The AGS site was situated near the entrance. Initially thought a good idea but in fact we were often bypassed in favour of the food. Sadly Bloom, it seems, has been taken over by *foodies*. The Postcard garden got a 'Highly Commended'. The team was unhappy about the judging but did make it known to those concerned, verbally and in writing.

The venture was a success in that the exhibit attracted huge interest and alpiners were introduced to the uninitiated, but the AGS didn't get many new members. However, financially, it only cost €100 as most of the plants and other accoutrements were sold and there was a €100 donated to each competitor by Bloom. However, there was no account made for the man-hours the project took..... Well done everyone!

After the Lunch, Gavin Moore made presentations to the following people:

**Frank Lavery**, Bronze Medal

**Pat Kennedy**, AGS Award for the small six-pan class in the Intermediate Section

**Billy Moore** – Farrer Medal for the Ulster Show

**Paddy Smith** – Farrer Medal for the Dublin Show

Gavin also reminded us about the Local show in Stillorgan (14 March) and the Main Show (April 11) both EXCELLENT opportunities for new exhibitors, selling plants and volunteering.

And last but not least, Jamie thanked Mary O'Neill Byrne for all her hard work, good humour and commitment as AGS secretary – big shoes for Barbara O'Callaghan to fill – and presented Mary with a lovely bunch of cut flowers.

**Amanda Chambers**



## Snowdrop gardens, 15 February

Good light is important in appreciating the finer characteristics of the countless varieties of snowdrops in cultivation and, in this respect, the trip organized on behalf of the Group was blessed. A dry, bright day saw about 25 intrepid garden visitors boarding the coach bound for two well established and highly regarded private gardens in the greater Dublin area. Both gardens had been visited by eminent British lecturers and snowdrop experts over the past few years and the resultant endorsements from such distinguished experts must have been gratifying for the two gardeners.

Emer Gallagher's garden in Barnhill, Clonsilla was to be our first port of call. This is a well-established garden, which Emer has developed over several years, on former farmland, the soil being essentially clay based. The well-established betulas, of which several are grown here, offer a structure and backdrop to this semi-rural garden, surrounding the family home. The snowdrops are everywhere, mainly displayed in island beds, to facilitate management (and also convenient for viewing!), the well established and widely grown varieties, such as 'S Arnott' and 'Atkinsii' occupying centre stage in their respective beds, with several of the less common forms grown on the periphery of the beds, often interspersed with *Cyclamen coum* and *Eranthis* species. As a means of displaying rare snowdrops effectively, this is a most practical arrangement, offering satisfaction to both those who seek the 'mass effect' of large swathes of snowdrops and those who seek to familiarize themselves with individual characteristics of recondite cultivars. Approximately 200 different varieties of snowdrop are grown in this garden, comprising the well known and widely available, as well as the more abstruse, specialist bulbs, offering plenty of discussion and interest, even for the most seasoned of snowdrop enthusiasts. Inevitably, opinions differed as to favourites, but there was universal agreement that





the bulbs were wonderfully well grown and tended. It was the first time that this reporter had seen 'Barnhill' a strongly growing, large flowering form, which arose in this garden, and the superlatives which had attended rumours of this snowdrop were well justified. Since the garden has recently been visited by Matt Bishop, principal author of the Monograph on Snowdrops, the second Edition of which is due in the near future, it is likely that this form will be officially recognized in the snowdrop literature. It was a bonus that snowdrops were on sale and several of our visiting group left with bulbs, as well as new ideas for growing them. One particular plant to catch this reporter's eye was *Eranthis* 'Schwefelglanz', which Emer kindly identified and advised that she had sourced this unusual, pale yellow variety, of German origin, from Avon bulbs. It makes a delightful and unusual companion to her snowdrops, more attractive to this observer's eye, than the more commonly grown forms.

After refuelling in the cafe at a local garden centre, the visitors were transported to the garden of Eileen and Gerry Collins, which sits cheek by jowl with the back gates of the Castletown estate in Co. Kildare. The family have lived here for twenty-three years, the boundary of their garden being the estate wall, beyond which can be glimpsed the river Liffey. The garden has been a work in progress for about fifteen years, notwithstanding the attentions of the grey squirrel, whose bark stripping has killed several trees in the garden. Extending to over an acre, the garden remains well furnished with trees, most of which Eileen and Gerry have chosen, *Acer*, *Betula*, and an enormous broad *Prunus* (most likely 'Tai Haku', but officially unidentified), among the most impressive. The garden is landscaped, with paths meandering throughout, offering vistas of the sheets of white snowdrops in the middle distance, seen through the trees. Like Emer, Eileen often plants some of the more recent acquisitions of her uncommon bulbs near the footpaths, where they can be enjoyed, against a backdrop of other, more established, varieties. There were several areas which were well colonized, the doubles being especially effective in this regard.

Both our host gardeners offered refreshment, as well as a warm welcome and were generous in sharing their knowledge and obvious expertise with galanthus neophytes, making for a most enjoyable day. It was easy to understand the superlatives which have been lavished on both gardens and their snowdrop collections by professional experts and authors. It was a brave decision to offer a garden visit in February, but one which was rewarded by the level of interest shown by members and by the evident pleasure which the day gave. We especially salute Emer and her husband, Brian, as well as Eileen and Gerry for welcoming us and sharing their experience, which allowed us to have a close inspection of these remarkable collections of snowdrops, a credit to their dedicated and gifted gardeners.

**Willie Reardon**

**'A labour of love - forty years at Potterton's Nursery', Rob Potterton, 19 February**

This was Rob Potterton's third visit to Ireland he said. He described February as a relaxed month at the Nursery but his understanding of the word 'relaxed' must be very different to mine! I for one was quite overawed by both the volume and physically demanding nature of the work involved in running a nursery as he outlined it in his talk, and he didn't even touch on the subject of all the administration! One member commented afterwards that he had now thought better of his 'dream' of retiring to open his own nursery!

Rob gave us a fascinating and eye opening 'behind the scenes' look at what running a nursery involves and of how it has changed over the years since Potterton's began in 1971, not least in how they receive orders – in 1998 only eight orders came via their website but by 2014 92% of orders were received online.



Rob's passion for alpines began during a trip to New Zealand as a young man. His love of plants he attributes to his late Father who won prizes in the 1930's for his carnations. It was clear from Rob's talk and photos that Potterton's is truly a family business with his wife Jackie as his business partner, and his brother-in-law looking after the website. It was all hands on deck, including those of his eighty-five year old mother and his two young daughters, in the battle to save polytunnels and plants during the severe winter of 2010 (when they lost one tunnel and 40,000 bulbs).

As for the plants - not content to show us pictures one by one - Rob took us through the months and seasons with a quadrupled feast of glorious colour by dividing each frame into four! One of the photos was of magnificent red peonies the size of his hand, which he had propagated from seed. However, I was reminded of just how much patience and long term dedication is required for growing plants, especially from seed, as these peonies had taken seven years from seed to flower. Trilliums typically take six to ten years to flower.

On the subject of vegetative propagation, Rob passed on several useful tips: take cuttings using a very sharp scissors; drop the cuttings straight into a tub of water; and use sharp sand in the rooting tray. However, the most important piece of advice was to save a lot of time and trouble by ordering your plants from Potterton's Nursery instead! His foolproof test for correct humidity in the rooting shed is that his glasses fog up on entry.

One of the things I found most fascinating was his description of how they pack plants for posting by fashioning a little newspaper 'cap' to protect the plant, or for taller plants, by packing scrunched up newspaper around the stem, then upturning a pot over it and taping it to the bottom pot. To reduce the cost of postage for plants in heavy soil, he wraps them bare rooted in sphagnum moss.

Members of the AGS Dublin Group who attended Rob's talk can be glad that Rob did not register his *Cyclamen* 'Nettleton White' for plant breeder's rights because if he had done, he would almost certainly have retired wealthy long ago and may not have been available to come over

to talk to us. Somehow though, I suspect he would have come anyway, because it was clear that for him, his work in the nursery is truly a 'Labour of Love'. For those who missed the night or who forgot to pick up a copy of his brochures, why not visit [www.pottertons.co.uk](http://www.pottertons.co.uk).

Rob's parting wisdom, which he received from his father, could be applied not only to growing plants: 'If you're going to do something, give it 110% - that way, if you fail, at least you know you tried'.

However, with Alpines, failure is unlikely as Rob says they are doing very well in recent years in our colder, drier winters.

**Catherine McCarthy**

### **Local Show, Workshop and Members' Plant Sale, 14 March**

There was a good attendance at the local show in St. Brigid's on a pleasant Saturday afternoon, but it is surprising that more members don't come along. This event presents an opportunity for members to see plants not normally seen at our main show in both the competitive and noncompetitive sections. Many of our best exhibitors have ventured on to the show bench for the first time at a local show. The informal atmosphere makes it ideal for first time exhibitors. There is also a section for photographs, which still has not attracted many entries, but provides an opportunity for members to learn the basics of exhibiting in the artistic section.

Entries in the competitive classes were of a high standard, the benches were well stocked and there was a good display in the non-competitive section.

As usual there was a very good plant sale of alpines (some purchased from Gerd Stopp by Frank Lavery, and generously donated by him to the sale) and other plants, including a selection of named snowdrop cultivars at very reasonable prices. I picked up a couple to add to my collection.

The event also provides newer members with an opportunity to get answers to any cultivation or showing problems they might have, as there are always lots of experienced and knowledgeable gardeners

available. This year, our new Show Secretary, Gavin Moore, gave a very practical demonstration of a number of ordinary alpine plants that he had bought in the autumn to show members how easy and inexpensive it can be to produce good plants for exhibition.

For the record George Sevastopulo got most points in the competitive section and the award for the best photo and Gavin Moore once again took home the watering can trophy for the best plant. Concluding with tea and biscuits the local show provides a great opportunity for members to socialize and improve their knowledge at no cost.

**Billy Moore**

**'In the shadow of mighty Kangchenjunga - a botanical expedition to the Bhutan and Sikkim Himalaya', Seamus O'Brien, 19 March**

This talk, presented jointly by the IGPS and the AGS Dublin Group, was much anticipated, even so it was a surprise to see a completely full house at Glasnevin, with doors shut and a few people unfortunately turned away, not a situation we are familiar with, we can only offer our apologies to anyone who could not get in.

After a few notes and pictures on well-known early explorers in this area, Seamus guided us through several vegetation zones, from tropical valleys to high alpine and beyond, with detailed notes on altitude and temperature, and many, many plants of course. Starting in the Punakha Valley, at 1200m above sea level, with pictures of the famous palace Punakha Dzong, built in 1637, and the original capital of Bhutan, with *Jacaranda* and *Ficus religiosa*, we rapidly moved on to the relatively new botanic garden at Lamperi, where they have fifty species of *Rhododendron*, and groves of *Taxus wallichiana*. Then on to Taktsang Monastery – or Tigers Nest – perched on an incredible precipice, with *Colquhonia coccinea* var. *mollis*, *Cornus capitata*, and



hillsides turned purple with autumn tints of *Parthenocissus semicordata*.

The Druk Trek – to 4000m now – with *Inula hookeri*, *Clematis montana*, *Gentiana depressa*, and absolute masses of *R. arboretum*, brought home how many familiar plants come from the Himalaya – even *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, which here is well behaved, meaning something must be eating it. I always thought it came from the Caucasus, which it does, but its home range spreads this far too. Surprising too to see *Bergenia purpurascens* here at Jungchulakha – as a high alpine plant.

On to Sikkim (I was out of breath by now, wondering how the trekkers had been feeling) and following the Hooker trail, we headed for Khecheopalri Lake, which is sacred for both Buddhist and Hindus, part of the Kangchenjunga National Park, and carefully managed for ecotourism and pilgrimage, with 600 epiphytic orchid species, just imagine!

No slowing of pace, and off on the tropical Yuksom 1784m to very high Dzongri, a 4000m Trek, that's a mere 2200m climb or more than twice the height of Carrauntoohil. Plants shown included *Luculia coccinea*, large scented flowers, and *Thunbergia coccinea* to thirty metres, both desirable, but too cold here, while *Curculigo crassifolia* is growing happily in a very dry spot at Kilmacurragh. *Mabonia acanthifolia* looked familiar of course, but gets to ten metres, and flowers in November. Also seen were areas of untouched primeval forest, with *Rhododendron* galore, and cloud forest vegetation with *Hymenophyllum* and *Trichomanes* filmy ferns.

Still no rest – onto Dzongri, and the Prek Valley Trek to the Rathong Glacier. Woodland of *Abies densa* gave way to high alpine again, *Androsace lehmannii*, and *Myricaria rosea*, with large drifts of *Potentilla fruticosa* var. *arbuscula* in moraines left by the glaciers as they retreat. Even at 5000m at Lamuney plants were found – albeit lichen *Rhizocarpon geographicum*, with map like patches. Also seen were Snowball plants – *Saussurea gossypiphora*, aptly named and highly desirable but no doubt impossible in cultivation!

Altogether a most entertaining and informative breathless talk, with excellent pictures, masses of detail, and delivered in a confident style.



The presence of many of his fellow ‘trekkers’ in the audience added to the atmosphere, a memorable evening about a memorable trip.

**Stephen Butler**

**'Out and about - adventures of an alpine gardener', Jim Almond,**  
16 April

Jim opened his talk with the promise that we would be entertained, and that we were. The lecture was a very enjoyable account of Jim's travels to gardens and gardening friends around Europe. Our first stop was The Netherlands to see how Dutch bulb growers cultivate fields of Irises.

Grown under straw, the bulbs are raised to maturity until ready for sale. Jim spent some time in the botanic gardens in Utrecht. There they have the very clever idea of growing alpine in large spheres made from flat stones and slate that provide many crevices in which to grow plants. As they are spheres, there are north and south facing sides so alpine requiring different conditions can be grown all year round. The spheres are irrigated by a steady slow feed of water fed up through their core.



A clever idea that could be accomplished in any garden, albeit on a much smaller scale.

Jim talked quite extensively about shows and showing. He showed some photos of Paul Ransom's greenhouse where he grows a 'production line' of *Dionysias* very successfully. The greenhouse is actually quite small, however he still manages to produce a significant number of red sticker-winning plants. It's clear that Jim enjoys AGS shows. His slides showed judges and the public just enjoying a good day out, including one enterprising photographer who used his wife's back as a background for a plant photo. It was nice to see how other groups show days are as enjoyable as the two shows we get to attend each year.

Jim then took us on a whistle-stop tour of some his friends' gardens including Rod and Jane Leeds, Thelma Hewitt and Anne Spiegel. Anne's US garden is a natural rock outcrop and looks out over some wonderful scenery. This tour was interspersed with amusing anecdotes of grizzly bears and hospitality where 'dinner was poured'. Finally in this section of the talk Jim showed slides of Michael Upward and his garden. In hindsight this was poignant as only shortly after the talk did we hear the news of Michael's sad death. Michael was a true personality of the AGS and will be missed.

In the last section of the talk, Jim brought us closer to home with some slides of the gardens of our friends in Ulster including Harold McBride, Margaret Glynn and Bob Gordon. Jim was very grateful for the hospitality he was shown by our group during his stay in Dublin. I expect that some of the local gardens that he visited will be in future 'Out and About' talks. This was a very enjoyable talk that included many great slides of plants, but was more about Jim's love of gardens and all the friends with whom he shares his enjoyment of them.

**Gavin Moore**

### **Ulster gardens, 9 May**

The weather was kind for our trip over the border on Saturday 9 May to visit two superb Northern Ireland gardens.

Our first stop was at the Bessbrook garden of Hilary and William



McKelvey where we were warmly welcomed. Their garden was a joy to behold and sparkled in the late spring sunshine. The smallish front garden tells us that the owners are alpine enthusiasts. In the centre is an outcrop of natural rock surrounded by a gravelled area on which are several troughs in front of a raised border with dwarf rhododendrons and other plants in flower.

The back garden is divided into different sections. Nearest the house are the alpine sections with a large and varied collection in raised beds, troughs and an extensive crevice bed. I particularly liked *Asperula arcadiensis*, forming a hard mat and trailing over the side of a trough. But there were treasures everywhere, including in the packed alpine house.

The main alpine bed holds a great many beautiful plants. I especially admired *Potentilla porphyrantha*. The Ranunculaceae were well represented with *R. gramineus* in splendid fettle.

Further on from the alpine areas there are two sections with an eclectic collection of herbaceous plants and shrubs. I encountered three fine specimens of a very good form of *Paeonia mlokosewitschii*. In the lower section there was much interest in a large open, shrubby rubus species (name lost), bearing striking white flowers with a black centre.

Hilary has a particular interest in clematis and has a large collection of both rare and familiar species and cultivars, accommodated on trellis work and pergolas throughout the garden. Although it was early in the season several were in flower and attracted a lot of attention.

Our hosts provided us with very welcome tea and coffee (served in best china) along with an amazing spread of homemade scones, cakes and other goodies to refresh us. Truly, to say that their hospitality was overwhelming is no exaggeration.

In the course of the visit William and Hilary were under constant interrogation about the plants and how they are grown, and both responded knowledgeably and enthusiastically, passing on many tips and useful information in the process. They are true plant lovers with a garden full of interest and the organizers had some difficulty in dragging us away.

When, finally, we got everyone back on the bus we drove to Dobbie's Garden Centre in Lisburn for lunch and some retail therapy. I acquired a *Gentiana verna angustifolia*, and an *Armeria maritima* 'Nifty Thrifty' with yellow variegation on the leaves.

It was then on to the legendary garden of Harold and Gwen McBride on Waverley Avenue. Harold met us at his gate and announced

immediately that there were two plants for everybody in the group. The plants were laid out on a table in the front garden which was immediately surrounded by his visitors.

The first thing one notices about Harold's garden is how immaculate everything is, from the carefully edged lawns to the weed free beds, troughs and pots to the stars of the show, the magnificent collection of well-grown, beautiful alpine and woodland plants, many of them rare.

He gave us a guided tour of the garden, starting in the front with its fine raised bed awash with colour. I think the highlight of the tour for everyone was his detailed and informative discussion on his wonderful crevice beds, and the many superb plants growing happily in them, most raised from seed. We learned a lot about these plants and their likes and dislikes and also about the construction of the beds and the materials used. Harold's presentation amounted to a master class in growing alpinists in a crevice bed.

Another revelation was the large bed in which Harold grows his fritillarias, meconopsis, lilies, snowdrops, anemones, gentians, celmisias and many other desirable plants.

The alpine house was another Alladin's cave of treasures, packed with many of the plants that have triumphed for Harold on the show bench. There were also many pots in frames and in the open which give an idea of the prodigious amount of work involved in managing this unique garden.

Three plants which caught my eye and I feel that I may be able to grow were *Aethionema saxatile* ssp. *graecum*, *Anemone obtusiloba* and *Silene acaulis*.

After a glass of wine and shortbread generously provided by Gwen and Harold, clutching our precious gifts we climbed back on the bus for home.

It was a wonderful day of friendship, generosity and two memorable gardens. Thank you Hilary, William, Gwen and Harold and those who organized this wonderful day.

**Barbara O'Callaghan**



## **'Alpines in the wild and cultivation', Diane Clement, 14 May**

Diane needs no introduction as she spoke to us last year in March, dazzling all of us with her boundless energy and no-nonsense attitude to gardening and related tasks, especially her tremendous effort in running the AGS Seed Exchange. This year's talk drew on her thirty-five years of travelling in mainly the Austrian and Swiss Alps, observing plants in their habitat and trying to apply those conditions in her garden. We got some background information on the type of terrain encountered, from lush valley floors, through woodlands, alpine meadows and bleaker, treeless and rocky mountaintops. Her interesting graph showed the tree line at about 2500m in the Alps but that gets lower and lower the nearer to the Equator it gets. While her photos showed European alpines, plants from the same/similar-growing zone around the world are also grown in her garden.

The talk proceeded to bring us on four virtual walks corresponding with the different levels identified earlier.

Walk one: In the tree line, dappled light, warm and wet conditions resulting in good growth resembling very much what we think of as a woodland garden with

*Aquilegia atrata*, *Doronicum austriacum*, which is easily confused with arnica, *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*, the red-berried *Daphne mezereum*, *Astrantia major*, the larger campanulas like *C. trachelium* and *C. barbata*, the dark red helleborine, *Epipactis atrorubens*, the delicate-looking *Parnassia palustris*, and, last but not least, the stately *Lilium martagon*, one of my favourite plants, but alas I have not been successful in growing the white form of same. So how is Diane growing woodland plants in her garden? A good half of it gets no sun for six months of the year but she can grow a nice selection anyway. Galanthus, cyclamen, *Eranthis hyemalis* 'Schwefelglanz' all seem to do well but must not dry out. She also finds that American erythroniums are easier to grow than the European/Asiatic varieties. Cypripediums are now more affordable and



according to Diane the hybrids are a lot easier to grow too. I particularly liked her *Daphne mezereum alba* which has yellow berries. Diane pronounced *Primula vulgaris* a pest in her garden but the same could not be said of a lovely white clump of *P. vulgaris* ssp. *sibthorpii*.

Walk two: This took us above the tree-line around 2300-2500m into alpine meadows featuring the highly poisonous *Aconitum napellus*, *Cirsium acaule*, a stemless thistle, centaurea and eryngium and a variety of orchids, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, the vanilla scented, *Nigritella nigra*, fragrant orchids and the orchid looking *Pyrola rotundifolia*. Most commonly we find *Rhododendron ferrugineum* which grows in acid conditions, while *R. hirsutum* prefers alkaline conditions. And of course lots of gentians, *G. lutea*, *G. punctata* and *G. purpurea* which is used in the production of a schnapps called Enzian. Not forgetting *Pulsatilla alpina apiifolia* (yellow), *Campanula thyrsoidea* and trollius. All these plants like lots of moisture in habitat and love it just as much in garden conditions. While *G. lutea* looked splendid in an alpine setting Diane conceded that her garden specimen did look rather sad and had not earned its keep.

In Walk three we moved up to more serious heights, around 2700 m where snow had melted just a short time ago. It is very rocky with a short growing season, and we find the many plants so beloved by alpine gardeners, soldanellas peeping through the snow or covering whole fields where the snow has just melted, the iconic *Gentiana acaulis*, *G. verna*, the lovely yellow *Vitaliana primuliflora*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Sempervivum arachnoideum*, *Silene acaulis*, *Pulsatilla halleri* which will be found south of the Rhone valley, and the exquisite *P. vernalis* which I found last year in the Dolomites only due to the snow having lingered far longer than normal. *Primula farinosa*, *P. integrifolia*, *P. latifolia*, *P. hirsuta* on acid soil and *P. auricula* on limestone all feature at this height. All these plants like space and good drainage and will grow well in troughs, containers, raised beds, crevice beds for cool roots or in tufa. Or try a 'crockery garden' the Taylor's compromise between a rockery and raised bed.

Walk no. four featured plants at a height of 2700-3000m where we find a lot of the cushion plants so hard to grow like the 'King of the Alps' *Eritrichium nanum*. Diane had a good graphic illustration of how the

cushion shape helped these plants to absorb and conserve heat and survive successfully. Another hard to grow plant is *Thlaspi rotundifolium* with its honey-scented pink flowers. *Ranunculus alpestris* and *R. glacialis*, *Saxifraga caesia*, *S. oppositifolia* and *S. aizoides* do not like winter wet and are best grown in the Alpine House in clay pots plunged in sand. Some of these plants grow well in the alpine gardens of Eastern Europe and Diane voted Vojtech Holubec's garden in Prague as the best high alpine garden she knows.

There was a lot of information in this clearly structured talk and everyone got something out of it, but I felt it was particularly useful for newer and less experienced members and I do hope Diane will be back to us again.

**AnneMarie Keoghan**

## FIXTURES

**Thursday, 15 October, 8 pm. Susan Band**, ‘Growing lilies and their relatives in Scotland’, **bringing bulbs**. Joint with **IGPS**. NBG, Glasnevin.

**Thursday, 12 November, 8 pm. Frank Lavery**, ‘Plants of the Algarve’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**20 to 22 November. 32nd Alpine Weekend**, An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth. Speakers: **Carole** and **Ian Bainbridge**, **Joan** and **Liam McCaughey**, and **Janis Ruksans**.

**Thursday, 10 December, 8 pm. Christmas Miscellany**, St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 8.**



## **OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE**

<b>Chairman and Webmaster:</b>	<b>Jamie Chambers</b>
<b>Hon. Secretary:</b>	<b>Barbara O'Callaghan</b>
<b>Hon. Treasurer:</b>	<b>Tessa Dagge</b>
<b>Fixtures Secretary:</b>	<b>Paddy Smith</b>
<b>Publicity:</b>	<b>Patricia Maguire</b>
<b>Members Secretary &amp; Newsletter Editor:</b>	<b>Billy Moore</b>

### **Committee Members:**

**Val Keegan**  
**Fionnuala Broughan**  
**Martin Walsh**

<b>Show Secretary:</b>	<b>Gavin Moore</b>
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Jamie



Barbara



Tessa



Val



Billy



Martin



Fionnuala



Gavin



Patricia



Paddy

## NOTES



Top: *Ipheion* 'Alberto Castillo' - see p. 13, bottom: Tim Lever's *Callianthemum anemonoides* at the Dublin Show. (Photos: Billy Moore)