

# ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

## DUBLIN GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 32

JANUARY 2000



A Happy New Year to all members of our Group. We had a varied programme in the latter part of 1999.

On the evening of the 22nd July, members visited St Stephen's Green and Iveagh Gardens, the former containing rock work, which is important in the history of alpine gardening in Ireland. A report by Ciaran Burke appears below. On Sunday, 26th September, a small group of members visited the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. We were shown the alpine yard and alpine house by Michael Higgins, who has recently taken over responsibility for these areas and to whom we express our thanks. The group then made their way to the rock garden which is being re-developed. It will be interesting to follow the progress of this project. On Thursday, 30th September: Chris Chadwell talked to us about "Alpines from the last place on Earth - Tibet". On Sunday 2nd October, we were back again in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin for a "Trough workshop" which consisted of demonstrations of how to make a trough by covering a polystyrene fish box with hypertufa and of how to plant up a new hypertufa trough. The latter was seen again at Termonfeckin where it was a prize in the raffle.

Our annual joint lecture with the Irish Garden Plant Society on Thursday, 21st October was given by Bob Hayward who described "A short journey through a long country - Chile, plants and places". It was interesting to see many familiar plants such as *Luma apiculata* and *Embothrium coccineum* in their native habitats.

*Cover picture: Lillium lophophorum, Western China.  
From a photograph by Martin Walsh*

Members' night on Thursday, 4th November was well supported and there was a good mix of slides and plants.

The Alpine Weekend, at An Grianan, Termonfeckin from Friday, 19th to Sunday, 21st November is reviewed below.

The last fixture of the year was on Thursday, 2nd December, when Martin Walsh talked to us about "The diverse flora of western China". Martin had been a participant in an AGS tour and was partly supported by a bursary from our Group. The lecture attracted a large number of members and guests; they were treated to an excellent lecture with superlative slides.

Our programme for 2000 begins with the AGM on Thursday, January 20th. Please note that this starts at 8.15 p.m. rather than the usual 8.00 p.m. Following the business meeting, there will be an opportunity for members to show slides and to talk about plants. Please contribute to this evening by bringing some slides or plants.

Our first garden visit of the year will be on Sunday, February 20th (2.00 to 4.00 p.m.) when, by kind permission of Robin and Mrs Hall, we shall visit the garden at Primrose Hill to see the fine collection of snowdrops, *Cyclamen coum*, and other Spring flowers. The directions to Primrose Hill are as follows. Take the exit marked Lucan (close to the Foxhunter Public House) from the N 4 and proceed into Lucan Village along the Old Road. There is a set of traffic lights close to the Gardà Station in the middle of the village; shortly after the lights, by the Willow B & B, there is a left turn into a narrow road - Primrose Lane. Drive up Primrose

Lane past several modern houses. Do not stop at a sign marked "garden" which is not our destination, but proceed to the end of the lane where you will be able to park in the grounds of a youth hostel. Walk back to the drive way of Primrose Hill.

On Thursday, February 24th: Michael Baron will talk on "Snow drops, daphnes and Brandy Mount House". Michael is the holder of the national collections of both snowdrops and daphnes at his and his wife's garden at Brandy Mount House in Hampshire.

Our annual lunch is on Saturday, March 4th (12.30p.m. for 1.00p.m.), Royal St George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire. The after lunch speaker is George Sevastopulo whose title is "Have a good one - alpine and woodland plants of the Pacific Northwest". This is always one of the more popular functions of the year. If you have not been before, do come this year and bring a guest. (A booking form is enclosed).

The Local Show will be earlier than in the past few years. It is being held on a Sunday (March 12th, 2.00 p.m.-4.30 p.m.) to facilitate members who work on Saturdays. The venue is St Andrews College, Booterstown Avenue. If you have never shown before, we encourage you to bring at least one plant (the schedule is enclosed); experienced members of the group will be very happy to help and advise you. In conjunction with the Show there will be a workshop on "Pests and diseases in alpine plants". Bring any suitable subjects for treatment with you.

On Thursday, March 23rd, Ciaran Burke will talk about "AGS South African Spring experience". Ciaran visited South Africa for the second time last year and was the recipient of a travel bursary from our group.

The overseas judge at our show this year will be Rod Leeds, who with his wife have a beautiful garden in Suffolk, where they grow a wide range of plants, particularly bulbs. On the Thursday before the show (April 6th) he will give a talk entitled "From Candlemas to Michaelmas".

The AGS Show is on Saturday, 8th April (1.30 - 4.00 p.m.) in Cabinteely Community School, Johnstown Road, Cabinteely. This is our "show case" event and the support of members is vital if it is to continue to be successful. First and foremost we need exhibitors. Do not hesitate to ask experienced exhibitors in the group to give you a hand if you have not exhibited before but are prepared to have a go. Secondly, we need plants for the Group's plant stall. It would help Mrs Anna Nolan, who organises the plant stall, if she knew in advance that she could rely on you to bring specified plants. It is not too early now to plan your contribution to the plant stall. Thirdly, we need quite a number of people on the evening before the Show and on the day of the Show itself. Mrs Valerie Keegan, the Show Secretary, would like to hear from any one prepared to help. Finally, please come to the show and persuade your friends to come.

On Thursday, May 18th, Dr Matthew Jebb will talk about "Recording the Irish flora: from Caleb Threkeld to the present". Matthew is the taxonomist at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. Many members will recall the extremely entertaining talk that he gave at Termonfeckin several years ago.

On Sunday, 28th May, we shall go by coach to visit one private and one public garden in Ulster. Many members

will know Carol McCutcheon from her visits to the Cabinteely show, always with beautiful and immaculately grown plants. Her garden, at Killinchey, close to Strangford Lough, is likewise beautiful and immaculate. It has been a firm favourite on our previous trips to the north. We shall cross to the east side of the Lough to Mountstewart which many people consider to be the best large public garden in Ireland. A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

## ST. STEPHENS GREEN AND THE IVEAGH GARDENS

Alpine plants and rockeries are not the plants nor the gardening style which come to mind when you think of public parks and gardens, excepting of course the rockery and alpine collection at the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. So a visit to the St. Stephen's Green and Iveagh Gardens at first glance may have seemed an odd choice for our summer garden visit.

St. Stephen's Green is undoubtedly known to most of you, and year round colourful displays of bedding plants can be admired there, but the Green is also one of the few, or perhaps the only public park to have an area devoted to rockery plants.

The park dates back to 1880 and the rockery, which for many years lay hidden beneath soil, was originally constructed in 1910. When the rockery was uncovered from beneath layers of soil, the Office of Public Works decided not to meddle with its layout but instead chose to retain its original style (that of the pudding bowl type).

The rockery is 110m long and the depth of the border varies between 5 and 10m, with a tall laurel hedge

providing the backdrop. The new planting was carried out in April 1998 and all the plants were sourced in Ireland. This large rockery was then covered with a layer of river washed stone to give a decorative finish and give the other benefits that mulch provides. Plants such as *Silene maritima* and *Nierembergia vulgaris* have established well, as have varieties of *Helianthemum* spp., but not all the plants have fared so well. Trying to grow plants in a public garden such as St Stephen's Green brings problems which most people will not encounter in their own gardens. Vandalism and theft sadly accounted for many fatalities and failures, as the plants in this busy park have had to endeavour to survive with little protection. When the rockery was planted, an effort was made to provide interest throughout the year, with spring bulbs being used alongside rockery plants with a long flowering season.

It is hoped that now that the rockery and the plants have become more established, it may be possible to introduce some more choice alpines. The rockery in the Green may be the only rockery that the many people who use the park may ever see; it provides an opportunity to show the versatility and ease of cultivation of many alpines to an as yet unconverted public. The Office of Public Works should be congratulated for taking the bold step of restoring the rockery in the Green and its interest in the project should be encouraged. Any plants that members might like to donate, particularly plants with Irish connections, would be welcomed.

We walked from the rockery to the Leeson Street entrance on our way to the Iveagh Garden past the herbaceous border, which also is not a common feature

in public parks; it provides a fine display throughout the summer. The Iveagh Gardens are probably one of Dublin's best kept secrets; they boast a rose garden containing a collection of old rose varieties, a box maze originally designed by Ninian Niven, and a huge, recently restored waterfall, of which we got a preview when it was in full flow. More restoration work is planned for these historically interesting gardens situated between Harcourt Street and the National Concert Hall. They were constructed in 1865 for an international exhibition and once contained a large glasshouse structure at the rear of the Concert Hall and even had a rail link to the old Harcourt St. line for the transport of articles for the exhibition, including large garden sculptures.

We were shown around this 8-acre garden and the rockery at St. Stephens Green by Ann Gormley and Declan Donohue of the Office of Public Works. They had kindly given up their time in the evening to guide us. They gave us an account of the history of the gardens and answered the many questions from a very interested group of people, for which we thank them.

If anybody wishes to donate plants for the rockery or have plants that may be of interest they should contact Ann Gormley at St. Stephens Green.

Ciaran Burke

## PLANTS OF A CELESTIAL MOUNTAIN - THE TIEN SHAN.

Billy Moore and I were fortunate enough to be members of the Alpine Garden Society trip to the Tien Shan in Central Asia in July 1999. We explored primarily the



central and western parts of the Tien Shan, which are located in Kyrgyzstan. As it is a poorly explored area, we were both interested to see what plants from the Tien Shan might have good potential for the garden. We found the area to be extremely rich and varied and particularly well endowed with perennials, which often occurred in huge quantities, for example *Eremurus* spp., *Geranium* spp., and *Trollius* spp. I've chosen five plants which are either little known or have not yet been introduced into cultivation, which I think would make valuable additions to the rock garden and alpine house.

A plant already in cultivation, but not unfortunately widely grown, is the delectable *Primula turkestanica*. It has an umbel of rosy-purple flowers, beautifully complemented by the purplish-black calyces. Its oblong, lanceolate leaves have distinctive purple staining and are dusted in white farina, which would make this plant worth growing for its foliage alone. It grows in massive swathes in an alpine meadow, wet from melt-water, together with copious amounts of *Hegemone lilacina*, or *Trollius lilacinus*, as it was formally known. The semi-double wavy petals of *Hegemone lilacina* vary from almost white, to very pale lilac and sometimes have a beautiful blue suffusion. The beauty of this plant is further enhanced by the boss of golden stamens. The Czech plant collector Josef Halda called it "one of the small wonders of nature". It is a plant that needs a lot of water while in growth. In the September edition of the A.G.S Bulletin, Robert Rolfe stated that some growers stand their pots in water during the growing season.

The sight of a honeysuckle growing on stable moraine at 3400m confounded us. *Lonicera semenovii* is a very

desirable plant that only grows 3-4" high and flourished in crevices of lichen-covered rocks. Its tight, slightly glaucous foliage was smothered in fragrant primrose-yellow, tubular flowers, which were slightly tinged pink in bud. It is a plant that shows ecotypical variation, with the specimens that we saw growing at lower altitude being less compact. As far as we are aware, it is not yet in cultivation.

A plant that caused the most ferment amongst our group was a borage called *Macrotomia euchroma*. It is an extraordinary plant, some 12" high, with a wonderful peachy scent. Its hairy bracts are surrounded by a cluster of tubular flowers ranging in colour from almost black through deep ruby to pale pink. The flower opens dark and gradually fades, so there is always a mixture of shades in one inflorescence. It is not an easy plant to germinate or grow, but worth every effort.

Throughout the trip we saw lots of different species of *Dracocephalum*, or dragons mouth, as they are commonly known. They were all garden-worthy, but the most outstanding one from the alpine grower's point of view was *Dracocephalum grandiflorum*. It is a plant 6-9" high with royal-blue hooded flowers, which have darker spots on the lower lips, all the more noticeable on a powder blue variant. In the Kazakhstan end of the Tien Shan, we had the good fortune to see an entire meadow of *D. grandiflorum* with pale pink *Polygonum viviparum*. Hopefully with access to the Tien Shan becoming much easier, all of these plants will in time become more readily available. Both *Dracocephalum grandiflorum* and *Hegemone lilacina* are listed in the Scottish Rock Garden Society seed list.

Martin Walsh

## 15TH ANNUAL ALPINE WEEKEND, TERMONFECKIN

As the last of the weekenders drove away into the winter sunset the impression left was that this weekend had been the best to date. That is probably an annual occurrence as everyone seems to think that the current year's alpine weekend is the best ever. Whatever the merits of this argument, this year's weekend was certainly a great success.

Many factors contribute to the enjoyment of the weekend, starting on the Friday evening when members show their slides and share with all present, sights from their trips abroad or gardening experiences. This year we had a chance to see Japanese gardens from the U.S.A., opuntias and windmills in the Canary Islands, rhododendrons growing in Australia and some South African plants (in South Africa), amongst other equally interesting subjects.

Then, there are, of course, the speakers, on whom much of the success of the weekend depends. This year's speakers included Bill Moore from our own group, who presented a talk about the AGS tour to the Tien Shan, an area with which few will be familiar. Bill not only spoke knowledgeably about the flora and showed us some great slides, including a view of *Eremurus* spp., Foxtail Lilies, growing en masse in the wild (my favourite). He also gave us some interesting background to this unusual and virtually unknown land (and he showed us where it is!).

It is not all lectures at the weekend: there are the many fringe attractions that add to the enjoyment. Retail plant stalls, the Society plant sale, quizzes to confound and

confuse, a raffle - with this year's lucky winner taking home a planted trough, a pottery stall, photographic exhibits, and a charity stall selling everything from millennium bunting to gardeners' aprons. Let us not forget the highly entertaining Saturday night auction, where bargains are sometimes bought and fortunes sometimes lost.

Bob and Rannveig Wallis gave two talks; the first concentrated on habitats of bulbous plants in the wild; the second on Morocco, an area not often covered in lectures. Brian Burrow spoke to us on native plants for the rock garden and on growing and propagating difficult alpiners. Both Bob and Rannveig, and Brian impressed us with fine slides and entertaining dialogue, while sharing with us bundles of useful information regarding cultivation and habitats of the plants.

The weekend owes much of its success to the staff of An Grianan who look after us so well and make available their excellent facilities. We must not forget also the work done by our own members - everything from flower arrangements, organising plant sales, taking bookings, thanking speakers, manning the projector, and yes, even the evil minds that conjure up those devilishly wicked quizzes and puzzles. Thanks to all those who work so hard to ensure our enjoyment each year. If you never go, you'll never know, but remember, it gets better each year!

Ciaran Burke

*This issue of the Newsletter was compiled and edited by George Sevastopulo. Please send material for Newsletter No. 33 to him at 21 Evora Park, Howth by the 1st June.*