



# **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**

## **Dublin Group**



**NEWSLETTER NO. 65 – WINTER 2016**

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Front cover illustration is of *Crocus alata* (pink form)- see p.32. (Photo: Janis Ruksans)

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## EDITORIAL

The increase in membership recorded in the last newsletter augurs well for the future of the Group, and will, we hope, be maintained. There is no room for complacency though, and we must continue to do everything possible to recruit new members. One of the most effective ways of doing this is for existing members to promote the AGS to their gardening relatives, friends and neighbours. The Committee will continue to ensure that we maintain the high standard of our lectures and other events for the enjoyment of members.

Mention of the Committee prompts me to appeal to the membership, especially to the more recent joiners, to consider joining the Committee. I believe the existing Committee is doing a good job, but I think, and my fellow members agree, that there is a need for new blood so as to bring some new perspectives to the running of the Group. There is one vacancy as I write, and one or two existing members would welcome a break.

Membership of the Committee is interesting as it provides a new perspective on the running of the Group, and it offers individuals the opportunity to influence policy. There are normally five meetings each year and these are held in the home of one or other of the Committee members. Once new members get a feel for the job they can consider taking on one of the officer positions.

The main qualities required are a real interest in making a contribution and a preparedness to devote the relatively small amount of time required to the Group's affairs. Persons with experience of working on other committees, whatever the field, would be especially welcome.

If you would like to become involved let any committee member know and you could go forward for election at the AGM or, if later, be co-opted as a member for ratification at the next AGM.

So, please give this some thought as the longer term future of the Group depends on having a committed, competent and willing team at the helm.

## ALPINE MISCELLANY

On behalf of the Committee I wish members all the very best for 2016 in their lives generally, and in the garden.

In this issue we have a splendid article from Martin Walsh on his travels in Bhutan in search of Sherriff's blue poppy. I'm sure that this article, or a version of it, will appear in more prestigious journals than this newsletter, so I'm most grateful to Martin for giving it its first airing in these pages.

My thanks also to my regular contributor, Liam Byrne, for his piece on *Kalmiopsis leachiana*, a plant that I've added to my wish list as a result of reading it.

Fionnuala Broughan has my gratitude for her detailed report on Susan Band's talk. I missed it myself but Fionnuala's account leaves me feeling that I was there.

I hope my rather lengthy report on Termonfeckin will be of interest to members who weren't there as well as to those who were. These reports on our various events in the newsletter give us a valuable archive on our activities over the years and will form part of the digital archive that Jamie mentions below.

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

In the last Newsletter I talked about our Facebook page: many thanks to those of you who acted on my suggestion and posted some photos.

You'll be glad to hear that our Likers continue to grow – we're now up to 821 (from 742 six months ago), so I thought I'd delve into the statistics behind these numbers. As usual Facebook provides me with a bewildering amount of information about who has looked at our page, but you won't be surprised to learn that most of the visitors come from Ireland (334) followed by the UK (100). You may be surprised to hear that more come from Moscow (7) than Mullingar (5).

When I urged you to post some photos, I didn't think of giving you instructions. Remiss of me, so here's what you do. On our page you'll see a menu under the title photo, with the options: Timeline, About, Photos, Likes, More. Click on Photos, then Add Photos on the new

page. That's it!

At our last committee meeting we talked about the need to keep archives of interesting Society material. We don't have a good place to keep physical material, and even if we did that wouldn't make it accessible. But photos, drawings, and other records could be scanned in and kept online on our website. So if you have anything you think would be interesting to share with others, come and talk to me at one of our meetings.

**Show Update**, from Gavin Moore

**Showing: Why Should I?** The Show next April seems far away as we head into the depths of winter, but I hope at least some of you think about it occasionally. Last year we had some new exhibitors. Next year we need to have those exhibitors back again, and get some more members to show for the first time. As you consider showing, or showing more, here are some pros and cons to think about.

**Cons:**

**Ambition vs Reality:** After cosseting a plant for months or years it's easy to think it's unbeatable. You'll find yourself thinking, 'this is definitely the year that this wins a prize'. You'll bring the plant along on the day, and yes, it might win a prize, but as often as not, someone else's plant will be better than yours. In many cases, you'll know it as soon as you put the plant on the bench because the ultimate winner will be some rarity so covered in flowers that the leaves are invisible. In many other cases, you'll say, 'that might just do it'. It can be a frustrating pastime so be prepared for some disappointments (but it's completely worth it).

**Judging is Subjective:** Because I've been a judge, I can say this: sometimes the judges get it wrong, yes it's true. Judges use many criteria to decide on the winner, however, sometimes the decision will seem strange. This happens for a couple of reasons: the judges may know something about a plant such as how difficult it is to grow or some other factor. Other times (rarely), it might be the opposite, i.e., the judges may be unfamiliar with how difficult a plant is. In all cases, you as

the exhibitor are entitled to ask the judges why they made the decision, and make sure you do.

**Pot Moving:** Starting now, show plants will be moved around the garden many times before the Show. During the two weeks beforehand, the plant could be moved twice a day depending on the weather. People unfamiliar with showing would doubt your sanity if they saw you moving a plant from one side of the garden to the other to get the best of the sunshine, the shade, protection from wind, protection from birds or any other potential disaster that can befall a plant prior to a show. And that is before you ever put it in the car for the treacherous journey to the bench.

### **Pros:**

**Red Stickers:** I tell my kids all the time that it's not all about winning – it's the taking part that counts. That's all well and good, but winning is better. Showing is about putting your plant alongside other plants and having them judged to decide which is better on the day. Every plant that goes on the bench should be prepared and presented with the intention of winning the class. When deciding to bring a plant to a show or not, I have one rule: if this plant were alone in a class, would it win a first. If not, it doesn't travel. As above, when it arrives at the show, it could be clear that it won't win the class, but leave it on the bench, you never know. The best part of the day is when the hall re-opens after judging and you get to walk around to your entries to see if you have any red stickers. It makes it all worthwhile.

**What you Learn:** Regardless of the colour (or absence) of the sticker on your entry card, make sure to understand the result. Even if you win, make sure to take the time to look at all the entries see how it was judged. If you're new to showing, find an experienced exhibitor or judge and have a chat about it. You'll find that you will learn a lot in the discussion. Even better, find such an expert and do a tour of the hall to discuss all the results. A couple of years ago I was a trainee judge and was lucky enough to follow three experienced judges around the hall and listen to their views on the exhibits. I learned a lot in that couple of hours.

**Day Out:** Finally, the most important part of the Show: it's a great day out. The people at the Show all share your interest in growing alpines, so by default, you have something in common with everyone in the room. Yes, this is true even if you are not exhibiting, but the day is so much more enjoyable when you have plants on the bench, especially if you earned one or more red stickers. You get to stand beside the plant all day and hope people ask you about it. It's ok to be smug, you earned it. I enjoy show days immensely, and not just the competition. There are excellent plant sales (to acquire red sticker candidates for the following year), great people, and plenty of food and refreshments. Speaking of which, I need volunteers to help out with the food in Cabinteely in 2016. Please let me know if you would be willing to help. I need people to help with cooking food, helping out on the day and, most importantly, some people who will manage the judges' lunch and the coffee shop. These people do not need to do all the work. They just need to make sure it all gets done. Good delegators are ideal for the job.

I hope that is good food for thought over the winter. Please consider showing in 2016. Once you start, you will never look back.

## **Fixtures**

For 2016 our Fixtures Secretary, Paddy Smith, has again given us a varied and interesting programme, which is listed on p. 41. Paddy has told us that he intends to resign from the Committee at the end of 2016, which gives us twelve months to find a replacement. The 2017 programme will be completed before he goes, so his replacement will start with 2018. Paddy has done an excellent job as Fixtures Secretary and is due a warm thank you from all of us for his hard work.

Our first event in 2016 is the AGM on 21 January, at 8 pm, in St Brigid's. I appeal to you all to attend the AGM if at all possible. It provides an opportunity for members to raise any issues about the running of the Group that may concern them. For example, are you happy with our programme of events, or do you have suggestions for changes that you would like to see?

Following the AGM, we will have a talk from **Billy Alexander** that he is calling: 'Growing hardy exotics and my travels'. Billy is the proprietor of

the beautiful Kells Bay Gardens in Co. Kerry, a Victorian garden that he has restored over the past twelve years or so. He is an expert on ferns and palms, and you are guaranteed to be informed and entertained by this talk.

On Saturday, 13 February, at 12.00 pm (note the earlier time), we will have our Annual Lunch in the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire. Lunch will be preceded (at 12.30 sharp) by a talk from **Oliver Schurmann**, called: 'Designing with diversity'. Oliver is one of our foremost garden designers and, with his wife, Liat, has won many Gold Medals both here and in the UK. They are also the proprietors of Mount Venus Nursery in Dublin. The annual lunch is always a convivial affair and I hope there will be a good turnout - with Oliver as our speaker I feel sure there will be.

In Glasnevin on 18 February, at 8 pm, **Assumpta Broomfield** will give a talk with the intriguing title: 'Myths, fantasy and frilly knickers'. Assumpta, who is a plantsperson of note, has given this talk to other groups and it has been given enthusiastic reviews. It is about snowdrops, with an Irish focus, but it is humorous and unlike any talk on snowdrops that you have heard before.

On Saturday, 5 March, at 2 pm, our **Local Show, Members Plant Sale and Workshop** takes place at St Brigid's. This is a very good event, especially for new members and members interested in showing. The Show itself, consisting of competitive and non-competitive exhibits, gives us a chance to see plants that will never appear at our main show. The workshop on cultivation and showing is always of interest, and there will be real bargains at the plant sale.

At 8 pm, on 24 March in Glasnevin, **John Mitchell** of Edinburgh Botanic Gardens will talk on 'The Stans – Plant exploring in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan'. These countries are very rich in flowers so this talk should be fascinating, particularly given John's experience as a plantsperson, traveller, photographer and lecturer. The **Ulster Group's AGS Show** will be on 9 April at Greenmount College. We depend greatly on members of the Ulster Group to exhibit at our Show, to bring plants for our plant sale and just to turn up. We

need to reciprocate by heading north on 9 April for what is always a most enjoyable day.

Two weeks later on 23 April our annual **AGS Show** will take place in Cabinteely as usual – see Gavin’s comments above, and please don’t forget to bring plants for the plant sale.

On 12 May, at 8 pm, in St Brigid’s, **Dr Keith Ferguson** will talk about ‘Trilliums and other woodland plants of North America’. Keith is an expert on these popular plants, and an experienced lecturer, so this one should not be missed.

On Saturday and Sunday, 14 and 15 May, we are arranging a coach trip to the **Burren** and a visit to Carl Wright’s wonderful garden. Carl will also be our guide. The number of participants is limited to thirty and more details will be sent to members well in advance.

I will provide more information about the autumn fixtures in the next newsletter.

**Billy Moore**

## Kalmiopsis

A member of the Ericaceae, *Kalmiopsis leachiana* is a dwarf shrub native to the Siskiyou Mountains in Oregon, USA, and rare in the wild.

Discovered in 1930 by Mrs Lillo Leach, it was named after her. It has many spreading branches and oval, dark green aromatic foliage. The small bell-shaped flowers appear from late April to May in terminal clusters, and are deep rose pink to light pink in colour. It is not hard to grow in sun or shade in the garden, but it needs acid soil.

I grow it in pots in a humus-rich compost of three parts leaf mould collected from an acid soil area, one part acid loam and one part granite grit. If leaf mould is not available peat can be used instead. I top dress annually with fresh compost adding a small amount of ericaceous fertilizer. After flowering, place the pot in a cool, shady frame. Water well during summer and on hot days it appreciates a spray in the evenings. Repot only when necessary, and after flowering. Until recently *K. leachiana* was the only species in the genus but a form arose which was called 'Umpqua Valley', 'Umpqua Form', or 'North Umpqua'. I have not



grown this form which is shorter and more compact than straight *leachiana* and was elevated to species status as *K. fragrans* in 2007.

*K. leachiana* can be short-lived so propagation is advisable. It can be grown from seed or increased from cuttings. I use a compost consisting of two parts peat and one part granite sand for both seed and cuttings. The compost must not be allowed to dry out. I take my cuttings in July into the first two weeks of August. They should be taken from a non-flowering shoot, preferably with a heel. Recently I read that cuttings can also be taken in December and I intend to do so this year.

I try to sow all seed as soon as it is ripe as this is what happens in nature. I never sow seed deeper than its size, and if it is very small I simply

scatter it on the surface of the compost and cover it with a thin layer of fine grit. Watering is done by partial immersion of the pot; never water from the top as this can cause disturbance of the seed. When the second lot of leaves, the true leaves, appear I prick out the seedlings, usually into three inch pots.

You will be glad of your propagation efforts if your plant suddenly decides its time is up.

**Liam Byrne**



*Kalmiopsis leachiana* (photo: Jon Evans)

## In Search of Sherriff's Blue Poppy

One of the most significant and arguably one of the most exciting plant introductions of the 20th Century was George Sherriff's discovery of *Meconopsis grandis* GS600 (now called *Meconopsis grandis* ssp. *orientalis*) on the Nyuksang La pass in eastern Bhutan in 1934. The introduction into cultivation of this spectacular blue poppy is considered one of the finest achievements of this remarkable Scottish plant hunter. For a period of seventeen years, between 1933 and 1949, Sherriff along with his English colleague, the equally singular Frank Ludlow, and their local collectors, explored much of Bhutan as well as parts of south-east Tibet and northern India.

They had a fairly disastrous start to their second expedition to Bhutan in 1934, when almost the entire party, with the exception of Sherriff and two of his collectors, were stricken with malaria soon after they arrived in Sakden in eastern Bhutan. While the rest of the party lay in their sick beds, Sherriff and his collector, Danon, explored the nearby Nyuksang La. Although, Sherriff discovered several primulas new to Bhutan on this pass, it was the discovery



of what is commonly referred to as *Meconopsis grandis* GS600 that was to cause such a sensation in the horticultural world. It should more accurately, according to the collection records, be referred to as *M. grandis* L&S600.

George Sherriff returned to Sakden and the Nyuksang La in mid-October of the same year in order to collect seed, having already placed seed bags over the dying flowers of the poppy in July. He was rather upset to discover that the yaks had not only trampled on, but had eaten most of the plants even though they were 'in such profusion before'. He ended up collecting just a single packet of seed!

Strangely enough, Ludlow and Sherriff had already collected *Meconopsis grandis* a year earlier on the Me La pass in the north east of the country, while one of their fellow collectors, Dr J.H. Hicks, would once again collect it on the same pass on their final expedition in 1949. So, what made L&S600 superior to the forms collected on the Me La?

Regrettably, this question is likely to remain unanswered for the foreseeable future, as access to the Me La is not currently available to foreigners. It is a politically sensitive area as it straddles the border with Tibet. In 2010, we did manage to obtain permission to explore this pass, but unfortunately permission was rescinded just a month before we were due to depart on our expedition.

*M. grandis* is a very variable species in the wild. It has quite a wide distribution occurring as it does in Nepal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan and, according to the Flora of China, also in Tibet. In his recent monograph on the genus (*The Genus Meconopsis: blue poppies and their relatives*) Chris Grey-Wilson recognises three sub-species with *M. grandis* ssp. *orientalis* occurring in eastern Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. While few people nowadays grow the true species, as seed of it is not always readily available, many of us grow some of its numerous hybrids with *Meconopsis baileyi*, including two of the better known cultivars in this part of the world, *M.* ‘Lingholm’ and *M.* ‘Slieve Donard’.

After following several of the routes of the L&S expeditions in Bhutan throughout our last three visits (2002, 2008 and 2010), we had always planned to visit the Nyuksang La with the intention of rediscovering Sherriff's blue poppy. Worrying rumours of a new roadway linking Nyuksang La to nearby Merak village, and the recent opening of the Sakteng area to visitors in the last four or five years, led to our decision to travel to eastern Bhutan in late June 2015. The Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary was created partly to protect the Yeti (Migoi) in whose existence many of the locals strongly believe.

Our group consisted of Johan Nilsson (Gothenburg Botanic Garden), Elspeth Mackintosh (RBGE), Julia Corden (Explorers Garden, Pitlochry), Koen Van Poucke and his wife Ann De Rijke, owners of a nursery specialising in woodland plants in Belgium and myself. In the

planning of all of our expeditions to Bhutan we have relied heavily on the knowledge and expertise of ‘our man in Bhutan’, Sonam Wangchen, Managing Director of Bhutan Excursions.

The normal trekking route in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is relatively easy as well as quite short, only four to five days, and takes in the two remote valleys of Merak and Sakteng. In order to get from one village to another it is necessary to cross the 4140m high Nyuksang La. However, as this route seemed unexciting, we opted for quite a different one.

From Sakteng we turned east and headed for the Orka La. However, instead of retracing our steps to Sakteng and then crossing the Nyuksang La, we opted instead to cross a number of ridges in excess of 4000m, which run parallel with the border with Arunachal Pradesh (Northwest India). This route would eventually lead us to the Nyuksang La and from there to Merak and the end point of the trek. In the planning of the new route we relied on Google Earth as well as Sonam’s knowledge and that of his local contacts in the area. As L&S had also collected many plants on the Orka La pass, east of Sakteng, we were also very keen to go there.

Throughout each Bhutan trip we have followed in the footsteps of Ludlow and Sherriff, without, however, being completely slavish about it. We have tried to add a certain pioneering element into each trip, to see what L&S might have found if they had taken a slightly different route. In the case of this expedition this proved to have been a very wise decision indeed.

Sonam hired jeeps so that we could travel much further up the Gamri Chu valley and get closer to Sakteng village, therefore avoiding wasting time at lower elevations. Stages of the road were still under construction and parts of the journey were a bone-jangling ride, even with the jeeps. We made it as far as Thraktree (2246m), where a landslide made any further travel by road impossible. However, we were now only a day’s hike from Sakteng.

We did not have to wait long before discovering *Meconopsis grandis* ssp. *orientalis*. In fact we first found it growing pretty close to our camp at



Choekiling at 3740m. These specimens had sky blue flowers with four flowers per stem and were growing on the margins of a stream in a forest clearing. Here, they associated with various ferns including the lovely alpine fern, *Polystichum prescottianum* forma *castaneum*, *Bistorta griffithii* with its pendulous crimson flowers and the ligularia-like, *Cacalia mertonii*.

Then on an afternoon stroll up a side valley at the same camp, an array of different colour forms was found growing in an extensive boulder field, which was surprisingly well-vegetated with several familiar garden plants such as *Potentilla fruticosa* and *Bistorta vacciniifolia*. The better colour forms ranged from pale blue to deep cobalt blue, but there were also slightly less attractive forms with muddy purples and even pink flowers. Initially, there was just a scattering of the poppies, often growing singly or in small drifts amongst the scrub. However, at the upper limits of this valley there were large and very spectacular drifts growing alongside sizeable groups of the yellow *Meconopsis paniculata*, a really wonderful and memorable sight. This alone had made the trip worthwhile, but there was still more to come.

We were not scheduled to camp here, but decided to do so as some of the party were feeling below par on that particular day. Later that night we came perilously close to losing all of our gear, including the tents, as we experienced one of the worst storms to hit eastern Bhutan in recent years. The following morning our crew had to burn some fish in order to appease the local goddess, whom one of the locals believed we had angered by bringing pork into the valley.

On the Orka La, the poppy was commonly found growing in quite moist conditions amongst extensive drifts of *Bistorta griffithii* that grew in open areas amongst rhododendron scrub. This bistort has quite a substantial and fibrous rootstock, and time and time again, we found the poppy growing amongst it, a habitat it seemed to favour. Throughout the rest of the trip we found *M. grandis* ssp. *orientalis* every single day until we reached the Nyuksang La pass, where a nasty surprise awaited us.

When we reached our camp at Tseshung, we once again found lots of our poppy growing with the yellow-flowered *M. paniculata*. There was

quite a lot of colour variation amongst these populations, including rather surprisingly, several deep red as well as dark maroon colour forms, and as one might expect, a multitude of blue and purple colour forms.

Towards the end of the trek on the approach to our camp at the twin lakes, Pho Tsho/Mo Thso, we once again found spectacular colonies of the poppy growing en masse with *M. paniculata*, amongst scrub on the rocky slopes surrounding Mo Tsho (female lake).

Here, they were able to find refuge from the grazing yaks. There were some superb forms with flowers in excess of 15cm across on plants that grew to just over 1m in height. Actually, there was quite a bit of variation amongst these plants with some specimens of just 36cm in height bearing flowers scarcely 5cm across.

We found it difficult to leave our camp at Pho Tsho/Mo Tsho, a really special place, which made us realise how privileged we were to



visit such a remote and spectacular part of Bhutan. In addition to finding lots of interesting plants we had breath-taking views of several Himalayan peaks including Gangkhar Puensum ( the highest mountain in Bhutan and the highest unclimbed mountain in the world) as the weather was glorious throughout our stay there. However, things were about to deteriorate as we headed to what was meant to be the highlight

of our trip, the Nyuksang La pass, where Sherriff had discovered L&S600.

The weather took a turn for the worse with heavy rain as we approached the pass. As happened more than once on this trip we received help from a local yak man in finding our way, as visibility was so poor. Imagine our horror when we discovered that the pass was so heavily grazed that not a single poppy or much else besides was to be found. The yak man told us that there were still a few poppies there up to recently. I guess if Sherriff was complaining about the damage done by grazing yaks just over eighty years ago, it is not too difficult to imagine the amount of destruction that had been done in the intervening years. The heavy grazing is probably exacerbated by the close proximity of this pass to Merak village. Luckily, we had found sizable colonies of this glorious poppy elsewhere, but only as a result of not opting to follow the normal trekking route; otherwise we would have been bitterly disappointed, and would almost certainly not have seen a single plant of *Meconopsis grandis* ssp. *orientalis*. What a thought!

Needless to say, we found lots of other plants throughout the expedition including *Primula sherriffiae*, which along with *M. grandis* was the one other species that we were hoping to find on this visit. *P. sherriffiae* had not been seen in the wild since it was originally discovered by L&S growing on a moss covered cliff in southern Bhutan. We found it growing in the exact same location as they did, on the very last day of our expedition, but that is a whole other story.

### References

Harold R. Fletcher, *A Quest of Flowers, The Plant Explorations of Frank Ludlow and George Sherriff*. (Edinburgh University Press, 1975).

Text and photos: **Martin Walsh**

## Obituaries

### Diane Tomlinson

Diane, who died recently at the age of 92, was a well known and well liked person in both art and gardening circles in Dublin. Born on St Patrick's Day, her childhood was spent in the romantically named 'Fairy Hill', a fine old Georgian house and garden in Blackrock, long since vanished under a modern housing estate. After attending boarding school in England, and some time studying nursing in London, she spent the rest of her life in Dublin.

An enthusiastic and long term member of the AGS, the RHSI and the IGPS, and being sociable by nature, she enjoyed immensely attending, and particularly helping, at shows, lectures and plant sales, and meeting up with her many gardening friends.

Ironically for such a keen and knowledgeable gardener, her flat in Ballsbridge, where she lived and entertained for over fifty years, didn't have a garden, but she was lucky enough to have the almost exclusive use of that of a friend who lived nearby, and there she pottered around to her heart's content, and industriously prepared dozens of cuttings and seedlings for plant sales.

In her middle years she became interested in photography, and never one to do anything by half, photographed extensively many interesting gardens both here and in the UK, and as far away as Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Capetown. Her slides and photographs were much sought after and used to illustrate both books and lectures around the country. In Helen Dillon's book, *Garden Artistry*, alone, she had over fifty photographs acknowledged which gave her great satisfaction.



Diane was equally well known in the art world as she worked for many years in the renowned David Hendriks Gallery on St Stephen's Green, many an evening presiding in fine style over opening receptions. She attributed her good eye for design and colour to her time spent there. Her love of and interest in art mirrored that of her love of gardens and sustained her during her long life.

As the years passed and time and effort given to gardening had to be curtailed, music was her great consolation, and, as she said herself, "was much easier on the back".

Her distinctive figure, sociable and generous personality, is much missed by all of us who knew her.

Text and photo: **Winifred Bligh**

### **Hugh Mc Alister**

Hugh was a big man in all senses of the word, and will be sadly missed on both sides of the border. As a member of the Ulster Group, he was well known to us down here at our shows and at Termonfeckin. Apart from growing superb plants himself, particularly in the acid range of soils from his native Castlewellan, Hugh was also known for his cheerfulness and willingness to help anyone. A regular at Termonfeckin, he always arrived with an attractive small garden for the raffle.

He had as great a way with words as he had with people, and he was frequently asked to introduce and thank speakers for us at the Termonfeckin weekend where he was witty, original and great fun – we will all miss him.

Our sincere sympathies go to his widow, Mary, who he always said he would be lost without. She was a



great support to him throughout his life and especially during his last illness. He is a great loss.

Text and photo: **Val Keegan**



*Tulipa hissarica* – see p. 34. (Photo: Janis Ruksans)

## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

### Growing lilies and their relatives in Scotland, Susan Band, 15 October

Our autumn season of talks got off to a great start with this joint AGS/IGPS talk in the Botanic Gardens. Susan Band (and her husband and her dog) came all the way from Scotland to talk to us about growing lilies and their relatives, something that she and her husband do extremely well at their Pitcairn Alpines Nursery in the Tay Valley ([pitcairnalpines.co.uk](http://pitcairnalpines.co.uk)). The nursery started as an alpine nursery about thirty years ago, but now concentrates on propagating and selling bulbs (mostly grown from seed).

Susan gave a very comprehensive and insightful talk about growing and propagating Northern Hemisphere lilies (and their relatives, including *Nomocharis*); she noted that there are roughly 110 species identified in that broad area, and she based her talk on different regions: the Southern Himalaya; Europe and the Caucasus; Western North America; and Eastern North America.



The **Southern Himalaya** region is home to about forty-five lily species and ten *Nomocharis* species; one of the most well-known lilies from the region is *Lilium mackliniae* (from India). Most of the species are from woodland and meadows with relatively high rainfall. All are immediate germinators. The early smaller lilies take from June to about October for the seed to ripen. Susan sows their seed in January/February in a well ventilated polytunnel. They germinate within about six weeks, when the temperature reaches about 10-15°C. Once the second leaf appears, it's time to prick them out (usually in late March); at this stage, it should be frost-free, but not too hot. They love leafy humus-rich soil. Some species that Susan mentioned as of particular note are *L. nanum*, *L. oxypetalum* (now *Nomocharis*) and *L.*

*oxypetalum insigne*. She mentioned that *L. lankongense* sends runners out and will often flower up to a metre away from where you've planted your bulb! For this reason, she notes that it's great for growing with and through shrubs. Other favourites include *L. lijiangense*, *L. taliense* and *L. duchartrei* as well as *L. papilliferum* and the lovely pink *L. wardii*. Regarding *Nomocharis* (also sown in January/February), Susan mentioned that more and more of these are appearing since China opened up more to plantspeople from other nations over the last fifteen years or so, but there are still quite a few problems with naming some of them (*N. aperta/forrestii* for example).

The **Western North America** region includes British Columbia and Oregon as well as Washington State and California. About fourteen species occur here. The coastal species (including *L. pardalinum*, *L. columbianum* and *L. kelloggii*) should be sown in November/December and kept above 0°C but below 10°C; in these conditions they should germinate quickly. The desert species (such as *L. rubescens*) are trickier to grow in our damp climate, but Susan suggests trying them in a dry woodland setting or under cover. The seed germinates easily enough (Susan sows the seeds on top of the compost and covers them with a layer of perlite). *L. humboldtii* from this region really does need protection from too much rain, but slightly easier species include *L. kelleyanum*, *L. columbianum* and *L. parryi*.

The **Eastern North America** region extends from Canada south to Florida. There are about eight species and it can be hard to get seed, especially of the Floridian species.

A note on scaling: Susan uses it where there are problems with plants coming true from seed. As an example, Susan mentioned *L. ochraceum*, one of the Chinese species: scales should be taken from a healthy bulb in October. Place them in a ziplock bag with peat and keep in a cool area, making sure they're not too moist, but also that they don't dry out. When they start to grow, Susan places them all into one big 20cm pot, with a top dressing of leaf mould, and then grows them on that way.

Finally, Susan shared some of her growing tips for *Fritillarias* and *Erythroniums*. Generally, seed of both should be sown in

September/October. *Fritillaria liliacea* (N. American) can be tricky to grow in our climate and Susan suggested making sure it's in well-drained soil in a sunny spot. *F. recurva* grows well in gritty soil. *F. camschatcensis* is good for our climate. For *F. raddeana*, which can take up to seven years to flower from seed, Susan suggested cutting a bulb in half (*transversally* not vertically) which encourages lots of tiny bulbs to form around the edges of the cut bulb. Susan warned that *Erythronium hendersonii* (a really beautiful plant I thought) can be variable from seed, whereas *E. elegans* comes true. Western N. American species such as *E. californicum* and *E. howellii* have very attractive mottled foliage. From Eastern N. America, both *E. americanum* and *E. albidum* are stolon-forming. Susan suggests trying *E. sibiricum* in an alpine house. Finally, keep an eye out for *E. 'Kinfauns Pink'*, *F. 'Kinfauns Sunset'* and *F. 'Kinfauns Sunrise'*, all hybrids that have been cultivated at Pitcairn Nursery.

**Fionnuala Broughan**

### **Flowers of the Algarve, Dr Frank Lavery, 12 November**

On a wet and stormy night there was a good turnout for Frank's very well-researched and well-received talk on a region that hasn't featured in our lecture programmes up to now. Usually people go to the Algarve for sun, sea, golf and whatever, but it should also be a top destination for plant lovers, given the richness and beauty of the many plants illustrated by Frank. His focus was on the coastal and Barrocal areas of the region, concentrating on the Ria Formosa and Cape St Vincent Natural Parks.

Using maps Frank gave us an overview of the region which has an area of almost 5,000 square kilometres. Threats to the native flora come from changes in agricultural practices, tourism and introduced exotics and garden escapees. Most of Frank's slides included the botanical name of the plant, its colloquial name and the conditions in which it grows. The best time to see the flowers is from mid-March to mid-May.

*Oxalis pes-caprae*, or the Bermuda Buttercup, from South Africa, an extremely invasive species, was Frank's first plant image; it is quite pretty but despite being preyed on by a broomrape species is well-nigh

ineradicable. Another invader, but very beautiful, is *Aloe arborescens*. *Carpobrotus edulis*, the Hottentot Fig, from South Africa also, is lovely too, but a thug.

Frank covered a large number of the native species but I can only deal with what, for me, were the highlights.

Bulbs included three daffodils, *N. bulbocodium*, *N. calcicola* and *N. gaditanus* (very rare), all very desirable. The Sea Daffodil, *Pancratium maritimum* grows in pure sand and has large, attractive white flowers. *Acis tricophyllum*, which Frank grows in a pot, is delightful, as is the familiar *Scilla peruviana* and the less well known *S. autumnalis*.

Of the many orchids in the region we saw several shots of *Anacamptis*, *Ophrys* and *Orchis* species of which my favourite was the Yellow Bee Orchid, *Ophrys lutea*.

Among the trees *Prunus dulcis* is widespread and beautiful in flower. So is *Jacaranda*, although not a native; its seedpods are used as rattles for children. Frank showed us pictures of several pines, a venerable olive tree and of *Quercus suber*, the Cork Oak.

Some other plants that appealed to me particularly were *Echium candicans*, loved by bees; *Orabanche alba*, beautiful *en masse*; *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* with lovely yellow/orange flowers; *Paeonia broteroi*, quite rare; *Aristolochia baetica*, a carnivorous plant; *Paronychia argentea*; and *Astragalus lusitanicus*.

As well as photos of individual plants Frank showed us some excellent group shots the best being one of *Papaver dubium*, *Anchusa azurea* and *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, an image much admired by the audience.

In the course of the talk Frank did not ignore the local wildlife showing us many pictures of insects; of storks, which proliferate in the region; and finishing the talk with a shot of a herd of goats.

This presentation was delivered with great enthusiasm and humour and I suspect that several members of the audience have earmarked the Algarve as a plant hunting destination. Our thanks must go to Frank for all the work he put into preparing it.

**Billy Moore**

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin 20 to 22 November



Joan McCaughey, Liam McCaughey, Carole Bainbridge, Ian Bainbridge and Janis Ruksans

The 2015 Alpine Weekend was up there with the best of them. Apart from the top class lectures, this annual event is most convivial, and gives delegates a unique opportunity to discuss their hobby with like-minded addicts and, indeed, with some of the experts that attend either as speakers or as delegates. One prominent delegate told us that if she were faced with a choice between missing Christmas and Termonfeckin, Christmas would lose out. I wouldn't go that far, but the weekend is one of the highlights of my year too.

Our new Secretary, Barbara O'Callaghan, took on the running of the event this year following the resignation of Mary O'Neill Byrne, and she must be congratulated on the successful outcome. She was ably assisted by Tessa Dagge and others, including Mary, who provided advice and also prepared the very attractive floral decorations for the dining tables.

Gwenda Wratt's stall was, as usual, a welcome addition. AnneMarie Keoghan ran the raffle, which was a success even though a disproportionate number of the prizes went to members of the Committee, including your reporter. Heather Smith produced a crossword which provoked a certain amount of head scratching among the delegates over the weekend. Val Keegan managed the plant sale and Miriam Cotter from the Cork group ran the auction and ensured that she got the last possible cent from the bidders. A number of people, most notably, Harold McBride, despite the fact that he couldn't be with us this year, generously donated plants for the sale and auction both of which provided a significant boost to the Group's coffers. Susan Tindall of Timpany Nurseries, Tim Lever of Aberconwy and Brian Duncan of Omagh brought a mouthwatering selection of plants which received a lot of attention over the few days.

Our thanks are due to all those mentioned and to everyone else who helped to make the weekend such a success, not forgetting Jamie Chambers who chaired proceedings with humour and efficiency, and devised his usual fiendish table quiz which is now an indispensable part of the weekend.

An Grianán is an ideal location for our weekend and the friendly and helpful management and staff contribute significantly to our enjoyment, so our thanks go to them as well.

The Plant Forum on Sunday morning where the panel consisted of Carole and Ian Bainbridge, Susan Tindall and Tim Lever with assistance from some experts in the audience did their best to answer delegates' questions on plants and cultivation.

George Sevastopulo opened the informal slide show on Friday evening with an account of a trip that he and Rose made to the Dolomites in July 2013. Despite the poor weather George got some outstanding photos some of which he shared with us. His shots of meadows were among the best I've seen, and of individual plants I was particularly taken with one of *Ranunculus seguieri* and even more so with his image of *Linaria alpina*, one of my favourite plants. Pictures of really floriferous examples of *Silene acaulis* and *Thlaspi rotundifolia* left me wondering why it

is not possible to produce similar results in cultivation. His audience was most impressed with his close-up photo of a chough in flight.



*Linaria alpina* (Photo: George Sevastopulo)

Heather Smith followed with some images she captured in the Rif Mountains in northern Morocco in March, 2015. She found the locals friendly and welcoming. Her plant photos were excellent and included fine ones of *Narcissus cantabricus en masse* and individually; *N. papyraceus*; *Saponaria glutinosa*; and a beautiful unidentified silver cushion. The village of Chefchaouen is something of a tourist magnet in these mountains and is famous for its blue buildings, which were well represented in Heather's fine photo. Pictures of lizards and a gecko added interest to her presentation.

Liam and Joan McCaughey took us to Wexford, England, Scotland, Australia and their own garden in Northern Ireland. No surprise that the photography throughout was exceptional.

In Wexford they were impressed by the Colclough Garden at Tintern Abbey which Joan described as ‘magical’. While bird watching in the North Slob they came across the choice *Pyrola rotundifolia*.

The alpine house at Harlow Carr Garden in North Yorkshire is very good as are the other alpine features and the garden overall.

Howick Hall in Northumberland, the home of Earl Grey of tea fame is well worth a visit.

On a late visit to Logan Botanic Garden after the SRGC weekend they were lucky enough to be given a tour of the garden by its Curator, Richard Baines. Logan is home to many tender plants one of which is *Salvia* ‘Amistad’, a specimen of which fetched a good price at the auction.

We then went to Tasmania to see Tree Ferns in abundance, a Koala Bear, tulips, orchids and birds. Joan finished her part of the presentation with a sign reading: “Here lives a beautiful lady and a grumpy old sod”. I can’t imagine that the latter reference could possibly be to the always affable Liam.

Liam then took us to Flowerdale, near Melbourne where his son has a house that was built to replace one that was destroyed in a bush fire in 2008. Parrots and other birds featured, but the photo of the Crimson Rosella stood out.

On then to Launceston in northern Tasmania with some nice landscapes around Lake St Clair and Cradle Mountain. Wildlife included small kangaroos, a nasty-looking spider, an Echidna (spiny anteater), a Butcher Bird devouring a Skink and an owl-like bird called the Tawny Frogmouth. Among the plants were several orchids including a caladenia, and *Diplarrena morea*.

Liam finished with a visit to Melbourne Botanic Garden showing us a photo of Guilfoyle’s Volcano, an old water-reservoir which has been redeveloped and features a collection of succulents and other low-water plants.

Jamie Chambers then gave us an overview of a brief visit he made with Amanda to the Picos de Europa last May. Despite the shortness of the

visit, and poor weather in the earlier part, Jamie managed to photograph quite a few landscapes, some remote villages and lots of flowers. Among the landscapes were several meadows full of flowers, which, while beautiful, Jamie acknowledged couldn't compete with those George had shown us. His pictures of *Lithodora diffusa*, *Pinguicula grandiflora*, a favourite of his, and a lovely group of *Asphodelus albus* were impressive. As were those of *Narcissus asturiensis*, after snow melt, and a field of *N. nobilis*. We also saw several orchids including an attractive *Ophrys* species. Jamie was very impressed with the Picos and vows to return. As well as being rich in alpine and a beautiful region it is also easily accessed.

### **Janis Ruksans**

The formal lectures kicked off on Saturday morning with a detailed and comprehensive exploration of the genus *Crocus* from Janis. This was a learned and fascinating talk from an expert whose knowledge, experience and love of his subject were manifest in the enthusiasm of his presentation.

Crocuses are derived from *Romulea* and the genus has seen enormous changes in recent years. In 1886 sixty-five species had been identified and even as recently as 1982 when Brian Mathew published his ground breaking taxonomic classification of the genus there were just over seventy. Now at least 200 species have been identified and there are more in the pipeline. This is due partly to new methods of identification such as DNA analysis, and also to the introduction of new species. Janis has introduced twenty-five new crocuses, and many new species have been found by two German botanists, Helmut Kerndorff and Erich Pasche (HKEP). A new species that Janis is about to introduce is to be named *C. duncanii* after his great friend Brian Duncan. The majority of crocuses come from western Turkey and the Balkans, but there are species that are native to Spain, North Africa, Greece and other places.

In the course of his talk Janis showed us slides of a great number of plants including many of the recent introductions. I would like to mention them all along with Janis's comments about them, but that would fill the entire newsletter, so I must confine myself to a personal selection. A small caveat: I am unable to check the spelling of the names

of some of the new species as there is no record of them on the internet, but I took the names down carefully from Janis's slides so I hope they are correct.

The first species mentioned were *C. nevadensis* and the related *C. carpetanus*, both variable in colour. Janis said that the former is easy and the latter, difficult. Some growers would say that *C. nevadensis* is quite challenging also. *C. abantensis* is a lovely blue and *C. ancyrensis* is deep yellow. *C. x paulinae* is a natural hybrid between them. The well-known *C. banaticus* (lilac or white) is an easygoing autumn species.

*C. reticulatus*, which is a good garden plant, is now divided into seven species, two of which are *C. darybensis* from Serbia and *C. orphei* from Greece. The yellow *C. angustifolius* is easy and a close relative of *C. reticulatus* and hybridizes with it. Good forms are 'Gold' and 'Berlin Gold'.

*C. pelistericus* has deep purple flowers and requires more moisture than most crocuses. *C. pallasii* is very variable but 'Homeri' is a really lovely form. The yellow, scented *C. vijicii* is "a real gem from northern Greece", according to Janis.

The *C. speciosus* group is very difficult for taxonomists. Janis will soon be describing a new species within the group, *C. armeniacum*, a beautiful autumn flowering species.

Janis showed a number of plants, as well as *C. duncanii*, named after well-known plants-people such as *C. brickellii* (Chris Brickell), *C. archibaldiorum* (Jim Archibald), *C. zetterlundii* and *C. henrikii* (Henrik Zetterlund) and *C. gunae*, a Ruksans introduction named after Guna, Janis's wife.

With some species such as *C. taurii* and the widely grown *C. chrysanthus* it is difficult to determine which of the plants named as such are really the true species.

There are some beautiful hybrids between *C. chrysanthus* and *C. concinnus*. Two new Ruksans introductions, *C. muglaensis* with black anthers and *C. henrikii*, deep yellow with brown backs, are attractive plants.

*C. biflorus* is very variable and has many subspecies, the typical species grows only in Italy. A lot of work has been done on this species in recent years.

*C. caricus* with a black throat and black anthers is striking but very difficult to obtain, a corm will cost you €60 from Janis's nursery. *C. antalyensis* is a good garden plant and is a lovely lilac with a yellow throat.

To add to the complexities of identification some species are renamed, e.g., *C. herbertii* is now *C. thiebautii* and some names are reinstated e.g., *C. athos*. It's little wonder that we amateur gardeners end up being somewhat confused.

*C. alatavicus* is normally white but Janis showed a gorgeous pale yellow form, and an even more gorgeous pink form, which is illustrated on the front cover. His last crocus slide was of *C. autrarii*, pale lilac with lines, which is the rarest of the autumn flowering crocuses.

Janis took us through the growing regime in his nursery, showing how it has changed over the years through experience, and to increase the accessibility of individual plants. Most are grown in deep square plastic plots which are plunged between sheets of polystyrene and covered with thick sheets of glass wool in winter, when the temperature can go down to -30°C, and went as low as -42°C on one occasion. He uses a compost of 3 parts coarse sand and 1 part peat, with dolomitic chalk and granulated fertilizer added. He places a layer of coarse sand in the bottom of the pot, then a layer of compost, then the corms, followed by another layer of sand, then more compost and finally a layer of grit. The contents of the pot are pressed down firmly.

The pots are fed with a small amount of liquid fertilizer with each watering using less nitrogen in the fertilizer in autumn.

On Sunday afternoon Janis delivered his second lecture on 'Choice bulbs throughout the year' in the course of which he covered all the main bulb genera and showed us many plants, every one of which was covetable. As with the crocus talk I have to be selective. It is worth mentioning that Janis propagates his plants mainly by seed, principally to avoid virus infection.

We started in July with *Crocus scharojanii*, which is difficult, requires wet conditions and was the only crocus mentioned in this talk. *Colchicum kotschyi*, has deep pink to purest white flowers from July to November, depending on its origin. It is a good garden plant with robust flowers which last for three weeks. Forms of *Oxalis adenophylla*, *O. enneaphylla*, *O. laciniata* and *O. loriata* are all lovely and are better grown outside than in pots. *Gladiolus imbricatus* (very hardy), *G. longicaulis* (highly scented), *G. humilis* and *G. atrovioleaceus* are all good garden plants.

Among the anemones there are many beautiful forms of *A. nemorosa*, *ranunculoides* and *blanda*. *A. n.* 'Explosion' is extraordinary, and is a mutant caused by the Chernobyl explosion, which also gave rise to double forms of *Fritillaria meleagris*. *A. blanda* 'White Splendour' is excellent. *Eranthis* is becoming very popular and new forms are appearing. *E. hyemalis* 'Flore plena' is nice as is the white *E. stellata*.

*Corydalis solida* is widespread in Latvia and Janis has a huge range of colours available, including 'Gunite' named after his wife. He has had a lot of trouble with rodents and now grows all these plants in pots. They are hand pollinated using a wet toothpick. *C. schanginii* is beautiful but only for pot culture.

*Sternbergia colchiciflora* is beautiful but sometimes flowers and sets seed underground. *Cyclamen kuznetsovii*, a species in the coum complex, is one of the rarest cyclamen in the world. *Muscari pallens* is a good garden plant. Among the lilies the yellow *L. monadelphum* is very nice, but Janis's favourite lily is *L. ledebourii*.

*Fritillaria eduardii* is very hardy and flowers earlier than *F. imperialis* which it resembles. *Fritillaria thunbergii* is easy outside and with its tendrils will scramble through a shrub. Many fritillaries need a dry summer rest.

*Scilla armena* (now *Othocallis armena*) is lovely – see back cover. *S. garganica* from Iran is very nice but is variable in colour.

We saw many lovely species tulips such as, *T. micheliana*, *T. ulophylla* – see back cover, *T. armena* forms, *T. berkariense*, a new species found by Janis which is stoloniferous and good in the rockery, *T. butkovii* (rare), *T.*

regellii (alpine house) and *T. hissarica*, hardy, beautiful and only 10cm tall – see p. 21.

*Allium gypsacum* is lovely but is excelled by *A. brachyscarpum*, below. Alliums from the USA, like *A. falsifolium*, need dry summers.

*Paeonia wendelboi* (yellow) is a most unusual paeony, is attractive and a good garden plant. At the auction on Saturday night a small specimen (donated by George Sevastopulo) was sold for €30. Janis informed the buyer that they got a real bargain because he sells it for €80.



*Eremurus cristatus* is the best and the earliest in that genus and the tuberous geraniums are worth growing for their decorative foliage. *Gymnospermum albertii* is a lovely plant with yellow umbels on 15cm stems. Janis's last plants were some irises, most of which are very difficult, saying that the juno, *I. rosenbachiana*, is better outside – maybe that's where I went wrong.

Janis is retiring and handing the nursery over to his stepdaughter, Liga Popova, but, given his passion for bulbs I feel he will find it impossible

to detach himself completely from the operation. The web address for the nursery is: **rarebulbs.lv**.

We were privileged to have these two talks from someone who has no equal as an expert on bulbous plants.

### **Joan and Liam McCaughey**

Some of the best talks I've heard in recent years have come from Joan and Liam and this one on Turkey has reinforced my view. Titled 'A Turkish Crescent' it was based on four visits to that country. As always the photos were superb, the story was interesting and Liam's skill in getting the most out of PowerPoint could hardly be bettered.

The visits were in 1979, Joan alone, 1993, 2007 and 2014. While the focus was on plants, there was also history, art, architecture, geology, seismology, archaeology, entomology, zoology and ornithology, all packed into a presentation that had the audience rapt.

Most of the presentation was given by Liam with an input from Joan about her 1979 visit. We started in Istanbul with the Blue Mosque, Aghia Sophia and other highlights. Liam showed the geological faults that have produced many earthquakes over the centuries. There is a significant risk of a serious quake anywhere in the country including Istanbul.

At all times we knew exactly where we were due to the excellent maps that Liam displayed indicating each route with great clarity. From the 1993 trip we visited Gallipoli, Troy, Pergamon and Ephesus before joining the 2007 Greentours trip to the Taurus Mountains in Cilicia.

The landscapes were magnificent, as were the plants. Highlights for me were *Cephalanthera rubra*, *Arnebia densiflora*, *Aubrieta canescens*, *Fritillaria aurea*, *Stachys lavandulifolia*, a beautiful *Lamium eriophyllum*, *Veronica bombycina* var. *bol kardaghensis*, familiar from the showbench, two lovely irises, *I. sari* and *I. schaactii* and an eye-catching shot of a huge expanse of *Papaver lacerum*. Liam also showed fine shots of two Hawkmoths at work, and several butterflies.

Joan then reported on her 1979 trip at a very troublesome time in Turkish history. She visited the extraordinary natural cone shaped rock formations, known as 'Fairy Chimneys', in Cappadocia and Bronze Age

homes carved into rock faces that were later used as refuges by Early Christians. She went to the monuments from the Commagene Kingdom atop Mount Nemrut, with statues of King Antiochus 1 hobnobbing with various Greek gods from whom he claimed descent. On to Lake Van and the Armenian Cathedral on Akdamar Island, which dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1979 the cathedral was in poor condition, but we will return to it later.

Liam resumed with an account of the 2014 Greentours trip to the Lake Van area which is in the Kurdish part of Turkey. Van cats are unique in that they have one brown and one blue eye. Orchids and butterflies abound in the area and we saw birds, including an owl, snakes and a turtle. Among the plants were *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus*, mentioned by Janis, and *Iris iberica elegantissima*, looking its best in Liam's wonderful photo.

Around Mount Ararat some plants of note were *Merendera trigyma*, *Allium akaka*, *Iris caucasica*, a half-metre-across cushion of *Gypsophila aretioides*, an *Eremostachys* species and *Tulipa julia*.

We visited the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Ishak Pasha Palace; a 12<sup>th</sup> Century graveyard; and the other Mount Nemrut, which is a dormant volcano; saw various reptiles, a little Tree Frog, and the very strange looking Willowherb Hawkmoth. There were some lovely meadows filled with orchids, including *Cephelanthera kotchyana* and other plants. There were great shots of more *Iris sari* but Liam's top pick was *I. urumiensis*.

We paid another visit to the Armenian Cathedral mentioned earlier and noted the extensive restoration that had been carried out since Joan's previous visit. It was here that she hurt her foot badly, an injury that has caused her a lot of difficulty since.

I will mention just some of the plants that Liam showed to wind up this superb talk. There was a nice *Astragalus* species, the lovely *Phelypaea tournefortii* from the Orobanchaceae family, the stately *Eremurus spectabilis*, the tiny *Fritillaria minima* and sheets of *Tulipa humilis*.

Thank you Liam and Joan.

## Ian and Carole Bainbridge

Ian and Carole, operating as a team, gave us two talks. 'Making the most of your garden by design' was the first one. Essentially the aim of the talk was to encourage alpine gardeners to think of design when planning and planting their gardens. It's a question of merging the plantsperson with the garden designer. Ian played the plantsperson for this talk and Carole, the designer. The plantsperson will acquire a plant and look around the garden for a spot to put it, whereas the designer will look at an empty spot in the garden and decide what type of plant would look best there.

A lot of thought must be given to the effect you want to create before you decide on your garden plan. We were taken through the evolution of rock gardening down the years and were shown some good examples and some hideous ones. The aim should be to create a naturalistic setting for the plants you want to grow.

The low size of alpinists presents a problem. Unless you can hide parts of the garden so that the visitor is encouraged to explore, there will be no incentive to move into the garden because everything is in view. Therefore, shrubs and larger plants should be used to create spaces for the smaller ones.

It is suggested that six categories of plants should be considered. These are: 1. Key plants, e.g., architectural plants, trees, tall aciphyllas, celmisias; 2. Structural or background plants, e.g., *Hamamelis mollis*, small acers, pieris, evergreen hellebores; 3. Decorative plants, e.g., rhododendrons, sub-shrubs, flowering herbaceous plants, *Daphne mezereum*, *Dryas octopetala minor*; 4. The 'pretties', e.g., *Glaucidium palmatum*, *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, *Meconopsis*, *Anemone trullifolia*, *Aciphylla dieffenbachia*, a special plant with typical aciphylla foliage and rich pink flowers ; and 5. Temporary (infill) plants, bulbs in variety such as erythroniums, snowdrops, *Corydalis solida*, *Scilla siberica*, nerines and short-lived perennials. Excellent slides of all the plants suggested illustrated the talk. Colour has to be considered: different effects can be created by using harmonious or contrasting colours.

The feeling of the garden can be changed by using mass and shapes, irregular lines and curves. Long narrow spaces cause people to move quickly whereas broad paths encourage lingering.

We were shown a number of gardens where these principles are used to good effect; Cluny, Branklyn and Keillour, all in Perthshire, the latter slightly more formal than the previous two.

Closing the talk Ian quoted the late Alf Evans: “you only ever make a garden once, after that you shuffle it about”. How true, so it makes sense to try to get it right first time.

There was food for thought for all of us in this talk as the principles outlined could be used even to improve an established garden.

Carole and Ian’s second talk was also a joint presentation which they called: ‘Modern Rock Gardening’. This was a very wide ranging talk showing projects in their own garden, in other Scottish gardens, in Norway, Sweden and in the Czech Republic. All the various methods of growing alpinists from peat beds to crevice gardens were explored. The talk was illustrated sumptuously with many fine portraits of plants and gardens.

Peat gardens are popular in Scotland and Sweden and we were shown how Ian and Carole built one in a previous garden, starting from scratch using peat blocks and timber. It is essential to build peat beds on a fairly moist area. A mix of plants were used such as, primulas, meconopsis, arisaemas, shortias, erythroniums etc., some small, some larger. We saw the newly planted bed which looked a little bare, but two years on it was filling out and looking very well.

Swedish peat blocks are quite different to Scottish ones which are much denser, and some years ago the Swedes exported their blocks to Scotland. We saw the peat garden in Ron McBeath’s garden made with the Swedish blocks, and shortias planted into blocks in Gothenburg Botanic Gardens (GBG) and looking very happy. *Pulsatilla integrifolia*, formerly *Myakea integrifolia* is very desirable, as is *Dentaria glandulosa*.

Ian then showed us how they built their scree garden. There is a lot of labour involved but it is worth it as two years later it was full of colour. *Pulsatilla flavescens* was especially nice.

Carole then took us to the Czech Republic where the standard of rockwork and crevice beds is hardly equalled anywhere. We saw some superb examples with many difficult alpine plants looking very happy.

Inspired by the Czechs, crevice gardening came to the UK some years ago. Alan Furness has been something of a pioneer, but Ian showed us how they built their own crevice bed and the result was very successful. Ian stressed the importance of using small plants. Some crevice beds, while suiting high alpine plants can be something of an eyesore. Ian and Carole's example seemed to blend naturally into their garden.

Harry Jans from Holland became noted for his tufa walls, which are ideal for many high alpine plants including such difficult ones as dionysias.

Raised beds have long been used to grow alpine plants and the Bainbridges' example, in which they used granite setts, looked very well. Ian commented that it is always surprising how many plants are needed. Tufa can be used for the raised rockwork on such a bed and gives excellent results. Peter Korn uses frames over some of his raised beds.

In Utrecht Botanic Garden concrete is used to make crevice gardens, raised beds and concrete planting balls.

Troughs of course are ideal for many alpine plants whether they are made of stone or fish boxes covered with hypertufa. We saw the wonderful bulb frames in Gothenburg Botanic Gardens in which even the fussiest bulbs thrive.

Carole and Ian emphasized the need for experimentation. For example, so far growers have had only limited success with some of the choicer South American alpine plants, so new methods may be called for. Perhaps pumice should be used more widely, also growing in pure sand.

*Calceolaria uniflora* for example grows in almost pure sand in the wild.

These two talks added greatly to the success of the weekend and our thanks go to Carole and Ian for their contribution.

We have another great line-up next year when our speakers will be Peter Korn, from Sweden, John Massey of Ashcroft Nurseries and our own Martin Walsh, whose international reputation as a speaker on mountain flowers has soared in recent years. I don't need to tell you that with speakers of this calibre we are expecting a full house so to avoid disappointment I advise you to book early.

**Billy Moore**

### **Christmas miscellany, 10 December**

This, our last event in 2015, was well-attended, given the miserable weather, and was most enjoyable.

George Sevastopulo took us to Lago d'Idro and its environs in northern Italy, on this occasion in autumn, where we saw the lovely *Cyclamen purpurascens* among other fine plants; Frank Lavery showed us slides of his old garden at Kilaguni Lodge near Stepside, which he visited in May 2015 for the first time in fifteen years to find it, despite years of neglect, still full of beauty; Carl Dacus talked about a number of fairly unusual plants, most of which he had grown from seed, the most outstanding for me being *Fritillaria karelinii*; Jamie allowed us to join him and his family on a beautiful walk that they took in December 2014 on the Hooker Valley Track towards Mount Cook (Aoraki) on the South Island of New Zealand – beautiful scenery and interesting plants, the highlight among which had to be *Ranunculus lyallii*; Koraley Northen ended the presentations with a miscellany of her always lovely images, ranging from dahlias to children's pumpkin sculptures and taking in Mount Usher and Mount Venus on the way. Our thanks to all the presenters for their work and my apologies to them for being unable, due to lack of space, to do them the justice they deserved.

Gwenda Wratt brought a selection of her cards and other wares for sale which added to the seasonal atmosphere of the evening – thank you Gwenda.

As is customary we finished with a glass or two of excellent mulled wine (non-alcoholic) and delicious mince pies thanks to Val and Ian Keegan.

**Billy Moore**

## FIXTURES

**Thursday, 21 January, 8.00 pm. AGM**, followed by **Billy Alexander**, 'Growing hardy exotics, and my travels'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Saturday, 13 February, 12.00 pm** (note earlier time). **Annual Lunch**, preceded by **Oliver Schurmann**, 'Designing with Diversity'. Royal St George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire.

**Thursday, 18 February, 8.00 pm. Assumpta Broomfield**, 'Myths, fantasy and frilly knickers'. NBG, Glasnevin.

**Saturday, 5 March, 2.00 pm. Local Show, Members Plant Sale and Workshop**. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Thursday, 24 March, 8.00 pm. John Mitchell**, 'The Stans - plant exploring in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan'. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS**.

**Saturday, 9 April, Ulster Group AGS Show**. Greenmount College, Antrim.

**Saturday, 23 April, Dublin Group AGS Show**, 1.30 - 4.00 pm. Cabinteely Community College, Dublin.

**Thursday, 12 May, 8.00 pm. Dr Keith Ferguson**, 'Trilliums and other woodland plants of North America'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Saturday, 14 to Sunday, 15 May. Coach Trip to the Burren and visit to Carl Wright's garden**.

**Thursday, 20 October, 8 pm. John Amand**, ‘Unusual bulbs and how they get to your garden’. Bringing Bulbs for sale. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS.**

**Thursday, 10 November, 8 pm. John Richards**, ‘Some Asiatic primulas’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**18 to 20 November, 33rd Alpine Weekend, Peter Korn, John Massey, Martin Walsh.** An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth.

**Thursday, 1 December, 8.00 pm. Christmas Miscellany.** St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 9.**

## 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>
<b>Committee Members:</b>	<b>Val Keegan</b>
	<b>Fionnuala Broughan</b>
	<b>Martin Walsh</b>
<b>Show Secretary:</b>	<b>Gavin Moore</b>



Jamie



Barbara



Tessa



Val



Billy



Martin



Fionnuala



Gavin



Patricia



Paddy



Top: *Tulipa olophylla*, bottom: *Scilla armena* see p. 33. (Photos: Janis Ruksans)