



Alpine Garden Society Dublin Group

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NEWSLETTER NO. 73 – WINTER 2020

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Front cover illustration is of *Ramonda myconi* in a wall in Howth. (Photo: George Sevastopulo).

This newsletter is edited by **Billy Moore** who can be contacted at 32 Braemor Park, Dublin D14 YX39. Tel. 086 8183140. Printed by **Snap Printing, Sandyford**, Tel. (01) 2958860.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

Best wishes to all our members for health, happiness and good gardening in 2020.

In the last newsletter, written in July 2019, I expressed some concern about the dryness of my garden then. I need not have worried given the quantity of rain we've had since. The garden is sodden at present, conditions not to the liking of alpinists at this time of year. There has been very little frost though, and today is sunny and dry which makes a nice change. It is worthwhile, however, if you can, to give alpinists in pots, especially seedlings, some cover from further precipitation so as to reduce their vulnerability to any really cold weather that we may get over the winter. It also a good idea to raise your pots above ground level as this will tend to reduce slug damage.

In this edition of the newsletter we have a fine article from George on European gesneriads which tells you all you need to know about these desirable plants. George's photo on the cover of *Ramonda myconi* makes the point. Thanks to Valerie Keegan for her report on Martin Walsh's lecture and to Mary Bradshaw of the IGPS for her write-up of Joanne Ryan's talk – I have an arrangement with the IGPS that when we have a joint talk, we alternate responsibility for doing the report. I hope my report on Termonfeckin, including summaries of the five talks, will be of interest to people who were there and to those who couldn't make it. It is worthwhile reading all reports on our events as they very frequently include cultivation tips as well as information on good plants to try.

On the subject of reports on lectures and other events I like to get these from as broad a spectrum of members as possible. I fairly often get turned down when I ask someone to oblige, which is not a problem for me at all as I recognize that some members don't feel they have the literary skills or have other good reasons to decline, but most people don't like to say no and are embarrassed when they feel they have to do so. I would really love to hear from any members who would be willing to write a report for me – there is no need to worry about plant names or any technical jargon that may arise as I will sort things like that out in the editing process. If you would like to help, please let me know at one of our meetings or give me a call; you will find my mobile number on page two.

The Website - from Jamie

I'm pleased to be able to tell you that the statistics show that use of our website is growing steadily, so I'm glad that people are finding it useful. My handy Google Console shows me what you are searching for that brings you to our pages, and it's quite varied - plants, people, gardens, but mostly, of course, 'alpine garden society'.

We've been adding more information into the site, so please go and browse sometime to see what's there. I've just updated the library information (<http://alpinegardensociety.ie/newsletters/library/>) with all the details of how to use the RHSI library, which is where all our books are now stored.

Gavin Moore wrote a piece on growing bulbs, an element in his scheme to get you to grow something easy for the shows. You'll find that here: <http://alpinegardensociety.ie/about-us/start-growing/>

And lastly, don't forget that the past newsletters are all stored on our website as pdf files, which makes them easy to find. Go to: <http://alpinegardensociety.ie/newsletters/newsletters/>.

Show Update - from Gavin

It's difficult for me to get much real gardening done in December. It's dark when I leave for work and dark when I get home and, this year, it seems to be raining constantly at the weekend. What is possible in December is thinking and planning for spring. If you grow alpine from seed (and you really should), now is the time to go through the seed lists. It is by a long way the cheapest, but also the most satisfying way to grow a plant, and especially a show plant. There are several plants that can go from seed to show bench in two years. If you need some advice, just ask one of the many experienced exhibitors or growers in the group. The other great benefit of growing from seed is that you can share plants with others and give plants to the plant sale; more on that later. The other thing to do now is plan for the shows. This is true for experienced exhibitors and novices alike.

The show season starts with our local show in March. This event offers a great opportunity for novices to put a plant on the bench for the first time. Some of our members are nervous about showing, and there really is no need, however, the local show is good place to start. Many of the experienced exhibitors are on hand to give advice and guidance. Next up is the Ulster Show on 4 April. The Ulster Show is a great day out and one of my favourite gardening days of the year, mainly because I don't need to do any work. The two Irish shows rely heavily on each other, so it is essential that we support our friends in Ulster with exhibitors and attendance. Finally, as it's our turn to have the later date this year, our Group show is on 25 April. This is the most important event in our Group's calendar and easily, for me, the most enjoyable show. We have added some new classes in the Intermediate Section for 2020. The 19cm section was a little mean in terms of options, so we've added several new classes to give you more choice.

Obviously, we always need more people to exhibit at all the shows. In recent years we've seen some new exhibitors be very successful, which is great, this means, however, that they are already moving upwards and onwards to the Intermediate Section. If you have never put a plant on the show bench, please consider doing so in 2020. I'm hoping that you will have some competition in the Novice Section from my daughter Alice, who is planning to have some bulbs, a fern and a sempervivum on the bench – fingers crossed. There is plenty of help available for new exhibitors, so please give it a try. The other thing we always need is plants for the plant sale, ideally in a clean pot with a label bearing the plant's name. Starting now, please start putting plants aside to bring to the show. We generate a good portion of our annual revenue from the show plant sale, so it's important that it is not only a great attraction for visitors, but also a financial success. Finally, after many years of invaluable service, Rose Sevastopulo and Anne Moore have retired from judges-lunch duty. We need volunteers to create one or two dishes for the lunch. If you're able to contribute, please contact me as soon as possible.

New Venue

The southside venue for our talks this year with two exceptions will be **Mount Merrion Community Centre**, beside the RC Church of St Thérèse in Mount Merrion, Eircode: A94 R2Y4. St Brigid's has been fine but there have been problems. Car parking is not great; the hall can be cold, and the heating system is noisy. In Mount Merrion there is ample parking, the hall is comfortable and there are tea-making facilities. We hope you will like it.

Fixtures

I would venture to suggest that no society in the country is offering a better programme for this year than ours. Our thanks must go to our indefatigable Fixtures Secretary, Triona.

We start on **16 January** in Mount Merrion with our **AGM**, followed by **Carmel Duignan** speaking about 'The making of a plant anorak'. It's important to have a good turnout for the AGM so that the Committee can hear about any concerns or ideas that our members may have, and what better incentive can we offer than to have Carmel entertain us afterwards.

On Saturday, **8 February** we head for **Angela Jupe's** fine garden at Bellefield House, Co. Offaly to see snowdrops and other plants. The coach will leave Mount Merrion at 9 am sharp and the cost of the trip including coffee/tea and lunch is €55. Great value for what should be a great day out. See booking documentation for more details.

Our **Annual Lunch** is at the Royal Irish Yacht Club on Saturday **22 February**. Lunch will be preceded by 'Thirty years as the undergardener' from **Paddy Tobin**, one of Ireland's most prominent plantspeople. Paddy is an entertaining speaker and there will be plenty of good gardening lore in his talk. We used this venue for the first time in 2019 and it was given high marks for food, service and ambience. This event is always enjoyable and this year it will be well worth the cost of €30 per person. Book early.

On **19 March** in Glasnevin, **Kevin Hughes** is our speaker on 'Using rock garden plants outside the context of a rockery'. We have had Kevin several times in the past, including at Termonfeckin, and his talks have always gone down well. He is a much sought-after speaker and a well-known nurseryman; he has recently taken charge of Cally Gardens in the

south of Scotland. I am intrigued by the title of his talk and am looking forward to it. Joint with **IGPS**.

We are back to St Brigid's in Stillorgan on Saturday, **21 March** for our **Local Show**, members' plant sale and workshop. We have been getting a good attendance at this event in recent years, but I continue to be puzzled that it's not a sellout. As Gavin has pointed out above it is ideal for anyone who wants to have a go at showing; the plant sale is really excellent, and the workshops are enlightening. If you haven't been before do come along this year. You won't regret it.

The **Ulster Group** have their **AGS Show** at Greenmount College in Antrim on Saturday, 4 April. Gavin has made the case for attending above and I heartily endorse everything he says. It is a good day out and we owe it to our northern colleagues to support it, if not by exhibiting, at least by attending.

It's our turn on Saturday, **25 April** when the **Dublin Group AGS Show** takes place in Cabinteely, opening to the public at 1.30 pm. Again, I support Gavin's exhortations to you all to come along on the day and bring some, friends, neighbours and relations with you.

Our longstanding friend, **Jim Almond**, will be in Mount Merrion on **21 May** to talk about 'Primulaceae in pots'. Whether you grow them for showing or just for display you will learn anything you ever wanted to know on this topic from a real expert. Most of you will remember Jim's style of lecturing from the many times we've had him before: his talks are always enjoyable, accessible and informative. Don't miss this.

On the weekend of **4 & 5 July** we have one of our regular trips to the **Burren** incorporating a visit to **Carl Wright's** garden. For the first time this year we're going at a time other than May. Okay, you won't see gentians but there are lots of other plants in flower in July, and Carl's garden will be completely different. You will find full details of the trip in the booking documentation. The cost is a very reasonable €190 per person sharing with a €35 single supplement.

I will provide more details about the rest of the programme in the next newsletter.

Billy Moore

European gesneriads

The family Gesneriaceae, to which the popular house plants ‘African Violets’ and ‘Cape Primroses’ belong, is diverse and widely distributed in the tropics and subtropics, but also contains several European genera and species which are frost hardy. Best known of these are *Ramonda* and *Haberlea*, both of which can be grown outside in Ireland without difficulty.

Ramonda contains three species, *R. myconi* (commonly referred to as *R. pyrenaica*) from the Pyrenees and the mountains of west and central Catalonia, and *R. nathaliae* and *R. serbica* from the Balkans. They are clearly relics from the Tertiary flora of southern Europe, which enjoyed a warmer and more humid climate than the present flora. The three species are superficially similar. The thick, hairy, dark green, corrugated leaves form a rosette above which the flat to open bell-shaped flowers are displayed on short stems. The typical colour of the petals is violet to pale blue, which contrasts nicely with the exserted yellow stamens; there are also



white forms of each species and I grow a pink form of *R. myconi*. Of the three species, my favourite is *R. nathaliae*, which is easily distinguished by its flowers that are formed by four overlapping petals, in contrast to the five petals of the other two species. *Ramonda* spp. in the wild are rock dwellers. In the Cirque de Garvarnie in the Pyrenees, the vertical rock walls are studded with rosettes of *R. myconi* (and also *Saxifraga longifolia*), which at flowering time in late May and June are reported to be a magnificent sight. This gives a clue as to how to cultivate ramondas. They are happiest in crevices in a vertical wall in part shade as seen in the illustration on the cover. They also grow well in tufa. They are ‘resurrection’ plants: in drought conditions, the leaves shrivel and become brown and appear to be dead but rehydrate and green up as

soon as the plant is watered. However, I think that in cultivation they grow more vigorously if there is a regular supply of water to the roots. They can also be grown in pots using a well-drained but moisture retentive, neutral or slightly calcareous compost. They respond well to feeding with a balanced fertilizer. Liam Byrne won a Farrer Medal with a particularly well grown and abundantly flowered specimen of *R. myconi* some years ago (below).

Most authorities consider that *Haberlea*, which is also from the Balkans, is monotypic. However, in the literature there are references to both *H.*



rhodopensis (the accepted name) and *H. fernandi-coburgii*. The plants that I grow are rosette-forming with funnel-shaped, lilac-coloured single flowers with a paler throat, held on short stems. The cultivar ‘Connie Davidson’ has slightly darker and more numerous flowers. I also grow the white *H. rhodopensis* ‘Virginalis’ which I think is more attractive than the type. I have seen pictures of plants identified as *H. ferdinandi-coburgii*, which have flatter flowers, rather like those of *Ramonda*. Perhaps they are intergeneric hybrids. *Haberlea* is easy to grow in positions similar to those preferred by *Ramonda*.

The third genus of European gesneriads is *Jancaea*, commonly incorrectly written as *Jankaea*, whose only species, *J. heldreichii*, grows on Mount Olympus in northern Greece, where it is protected. It is a most beautiful plant, forming rosettes of felted, silver-grey leaves and several violet bell-shaped flowers on short flowering stems. It is difficult to acquire and also difficult to cultivate. However, some growers have achieved considerable success, to the extent that self-sown seedlings have prospered. One of these is the Dutch maestro Harry Jans, who has plants growing outside on his tufa wall. The conditions that he has created, vertical crevices with excellent drainage and a ready supply of moisture from the irrigation system built into the wall, mimic the plants' habitat in the wild – limestone cliffs with plenty of moisture from swirling mists and nearby streams, but enough breeze to ensure that the crowns of the plants remain dry.

Where the ranges of *Ramonda serbica* and *R. nathaliae* overlap, natural hybrids between the two species occur. Both intergeneric and intrageneric hybrids between the five European species have been created by horticulturalists. Of these, I grow x *Ramberlea* 'Inchgarth' which has pale lilac flowers that are intermediate in shape between those of *Ramonda* and *Haberlea*. I have attempted but lost the beautiful x *Jancaemonda vandedemii*, which has the lovely silver-grey foliage of *Jancaea* but is reputedly easier to grow.

Propagation of all five species is by seed (apart from *Jancaea*, commonly available from society seed exchanges), by leaf cuttings or by division.

The tough seed capsules split in June or July to yield hundreds of individual dust-like seeds. They germinate readily but grow extremely slowly. To prevent the tiny seedlings drying out (which is fatal) or being overgrown by liverwort, I sow the seed on top of chopped sphagnum moss which I first sterilize with boiling water. The compost below the sphagnum is a perlite and John Innes mix (also sterilized) contained in a round pot, capped by a clear plastic beaker that fits tightly within the rim. The mini-greenhouse so formed is kept on a north-facing windowsill out of direct sunlight because the seedlings scorch easily. I make sure that the compost is kept moist by occasionally steeping the pot in water. The seedlings should not be moved until they make rosettes approximately five millimetres across, which may take up to two years. After that they can be potted on, preferably in June or July, and

will grow much faster. I have read that growth can be speeded up by placing the pots under grow lights but have not tried this technique.

Many gesneriads can be propagated by leaf cuttings. A leaf from the centre of the rosette should be detached by pulling it downward so that it comes away with the entire petiole. The leaf should be inserted to about a third of its length, petiole down, in the cutting compost (sand plus vermiculite, for example). After several months small plantlets will develop from the leaf, which should be left until it rots away. Side rosettes detached from larger plants can also be rooted in a cutting compost.

As well as European taxa, there are Asiatic and South American gesneriads that are grown and exhibited by alpine enthusiasts, but that is a story for another day.

George Sevastopulo



Paeonia wendelboi – see p.31. (Photo: Frederick Depalle).

PLANT PORTRAIT

Daphne x susannae 'Tichborne'



Photo: Billy Moore

The *x susannae* hybrids are crosses between *D. collina* of gardens and *D. arbuscula*. There are a number of named hybrids such as 'Cheriton', 'Anton Fahndrich', 'Lawrence Crocker' and 'Tage Lundell', all worth growing and varying in vigour, flower, habit and ease of cultivation. 'Tichborne' is the most compact hybrid and, as you can see from the photo above, is very floriferous; it is also very fragrant. It grows to about 25cm high and 45cm wide. It is also quite vigorous: my plant is only four years old (I got it as a rooted cutting from Gavin). It usually flowers in April but the photo above was taken in late March last year; 2019 was an early year, for me anyway. It is easily propagated by cuttings taken in mid-June which should be ready for potting in August. It is readily available and if you like daphnes you should get yourself one.

Billy Moore

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

‘Fifteen Years Hard Labour on Kew’s Rock Garden’, Joanne Ryan,
17 October

Joanne Ryan spoke to a combined Alpine Garden Society and IGPS group on 17 October in NBG, Glasnevin. As the title suggests, Joanne had put in fifteen years on the construction of the new rock garden at Kew before moving on to work for the National Trust. She began with a short history of the rock garden and alpine displays at Kew. The first Alpine House opened in 1887 and since 2003 displays the Bonsai Collection. The second Alpine House opened in 1981. Though popular with the public, problems with ventilation led to plans to replace it.

For the new house and rock garden, 80% of the rocks were moved with only two or three people working on the site for safety reasons. Almost two tonnes of rocks were sourced and drivers trained to use cranes, Hilti chisels and diamond cutters to set rocks in the correct levels, all before a collecting trip to New Zealand. Her photos really showed the extent of the physical work needed before any plants could be placed. The third Alpine House was begun in 2004 – 2005. It is based on the design of a termite mound. The house opened in 2006. It contains 90m² of permanent and staged planting. Old soil was used, then Kew No. 1 mix with no feed. *Gladiolus ecklonii* was planted at the edges with upside down turves used for edging elsewhere. On a S.E. corner *Androsace bulleyana*, and *Draba bryoides* were wedged in with a tiny amount of compost.

What awaits you now the work is completed?

Joanne ran through the pleasures of the year, only some of which I can list here. In October, *Ipheion sessile*, *Cyclamen graecum*, in November *Cyclamen cyprium*, *Crocus ochroleucus*. December presents *Galanthus elwesii* var. *monostictus*, which flowers on Christmas Day, and *Euphorbia myrsinites*.

In the New Year, expect *Galantus ikariae*, *G. nivalis* ‘S Arnott’ and *G. ‘Modern Art’*. Visit in March and find a Turkish endemic *Paeonia kesrouanensis*, *Tulipa sylvestris* and *T. humilis* ‘Lilliput’. April shows off *Narcissus bulbocodium* subsp. *bulbocodium*, *Tulipa orphanidea* and *Fritillaria*

acmopetala. In May, look for *Pulsatilla patens* subsp. *flavescens*, *Pleione formosana* and *Ramonda nathaliae* which is not difficult. In June, you will see the easy to grow *Iris variegata* with the trickier *Dianthus alpinus*. July brings *Campanula thyrsoides*, *C. fragilis* subsp. *cavolinii*. August gives us *Castilleja integra* - a semi-parasitic plant from Oregon and N. California. In September as autumn approaches, look for *Cyclamen africanum* from Algeria and *Crocus tournefortii*.

The rock garden is a wonderful scene of beauty and a great credit to Joanne and all her team, not just for the hard physical labour required but for the depth of horticultural knowledge underlying the planting

M. Bradshaw, IGPS

‘A Wicklow walled-garden – Reimagined’, Martin Walsh, 7

November.

What a fascinating talk we had from Martin! While some members were fortunate enough to have visited the Kilquade House Estate, I missed it.

Martin cleverly led us into his project with a combination of old OS maps and several good aerial views of the old estate. What a challenge he faced. His brief was to create an area for summer entertaining with plenty of colour and interest in an old neglected walled garden.

This was to give us a new angle to Martin’s talents – his previous lectures dealt with his plant hunting trips to the Himalayas.

The problems facing him were many, including the levels in the garden, there was a slope from one side to the other, part of it flooded in the winter; no hard paths; an ugly pergola in the wrong place; and bad box blight.

He was to put his main centrepiece bed at the lower section, so he designed a long 7m-wide, raised bed behind a granite faced wall – in two sections with an area for entertaining in the middle.

2012 started the heavy work of laying hard core paths, building the wall, draining the area and laying brick paths in the centre. This all involved a team of people under the guidance of the estate manager and head gardener David Gillard. As Wicklow granite was not available the granite

was cut to size in Portugal as were his designs of caps for pillars and the circular surrounds for the central pond.

The design and choice of plants were fascinating with a one metre grid laid out to ensure the planting followed the design. Magnolias, shrubs such as choisyas, and wall climbers gave height to the back of the bed, sloping gently to lower and trailing plants in the front. His photos were superb and painted a picture for us. Around the walled-garden



the borders varied – one lovely corner surrounding the original small entrance door was planted in green and white and given height by two standard privets. The door was then removed and replaced with an elegant iron gate giving even more views. Another large border was completely made up of annuals propagated each year by the Head Gardener and his team – amazing that such a rich, colourful and imposing border could have been created by using ‘mere’ annuals. There is a potager and vegetable garden with brick paths laid to match the walls, a circular pool and a new oak pergola covered with *Rosa* ‘Snow Goose’ – a short, repeat-flowering rambler.

Martin really impressed us with a visual tour of the planting – an encyclopaedic group of photographs with names of the plants involved – mouth-watering. It was lovely to see spaces big enough to take large clumps of plants showing them off at their best (luckily, he supplied us with a list).

I am so glad that Martin kept a photographic record of the growth of the garden. He talked of more to come - a circular (oval) garden with two layers of hedge still to be sorted...another lecture hopefully.

I am off now to look for *Rosa* ‘Aspirin’ and maybe a few others!

Val Keegan



The long border and some of the rectangular borders at Kilquade House. (Photos: Martin Walsh)

36th Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin, 15 – 17 November

We had another great weekend at An Grianán in Termonfeckin. Even the weather cooperated, being mainly dry and cool with no frost. We had five superb talks from our eminent lecturers, Johan Nilson, Hester Forde and Julian Sutton, pictured below, which I will try to summarize for you later. As is usually the case, our speakers were friendly and accessible



throughout the weekend and were happy to answer, on a one to one basis or to a group, any questions from the delegates. This is one of the unsung benefits of the weekend as is the opportunity to discuss any gardening problems or queries, not only with the speakers, but also with any of the many expert growers who attend. Veteran weekenders are familiar with the friendly atmosphere which pervades throughout,

providing a social side to the gathering which is greatly appreciated by everyone. On this occasion we had a fair number of newcomers as a result of our encouraging attendance on the Saturday only, for those who were daunted by the prospect of coming for the full weekend. Our hope is that at least some among that cohort will go for the whole caboodle in 2020 and future years.

Something the day attendees miss is the fun to be had on Saturday evening by participating in Jamie's challenging, but very enjoyable table quiz. An opportunity to acquire some special plants is provided by the auction afterwards presided over magisterially and amusingly by George. There is then the opportunity to retire to the bar for more plant chat. The lively Discussion Forum on Sunday morning allows delegates to question the speakers and plant sellers on any gardening topic that concerns them, and we find each year that the discussion runs over its allotted time and participants have to rush to attend our own plant sale.

As well as our sale we always have some commercial sellers, on this occasion, Susan Tindall of Timpany Nurseries, Finlay Colley of Rare Plants Ireland and Julian Sutton of Desirable Plants all of whom did a brisk trade. Jimi Blake attended with copies of his highly acclaimed, recently published book for sale.

The weekend takes a fair bit of organizing and our thanks are due to Barbara and her team for all their efforts to ensure that everything ran smoothly. Jamie presided over proceedings firmly but with great good humour and we all really appreciate his input. Gwenda had her usual display of cards and various *objets d'art* for sale and as an acknowledgement of her contribution to the event over the years a special presentation was made to her on this occasion. We thank Heather for her teasing crossword; Valerie and her team for looking after the plant sale; and Triona who pestered everyone to buy tickets for the raffle. We thank the donors of plants for the plant sale and the auction the proceeds of which go a long way to making the weekend financially viable. Finally, our thanks to all the delegates including our friends from the Ulster and Cork groups.

Although the formal programme for the weekend starts on Saturday there is an option to arrive on Friday evening for High Tea at 6 pm followed by an informal slide show at 8 pm. This option is taken up by about thirty delegates usually. On this occasion we had excellent presentations from five delegates which I will describe briefly.

First up was Joan McCaughey who told us about a couple of gardens in Ulster which can be visited and had a few words to say about her own garden. Ballyedmond Castle near Rostrevor, Co. Down is a formal garden now owned by Lady Ballyedmond and is open to groups. The house was a hotel in the past and was bombed by the IRA in 1979. It is all now fully restored, and a lot of work has been done on the gardens. Apart from the formal planting there is a woodland garden, a greenhouse and cold frames. There is extensive statuary, ponds, fountains, gazebos and a magnificent orangerie where visitors can take afternoon tea. Joan then brought us to Montalto Estate in Ballynahinch which is well worth a visit. The current owners are interested in alpines and there is a large rock garden. It was here at a gathering in the gardens in 1938 that a decision was taken to establish the Ulster Group of the AGS. In her own garden Joan showed us some spectacular examples of autumn colour on acers, clethra, *Rhamnus frangula*, parrotia, euonymus, sorbus and the star, *Liquidambar styraciflua*. Sadly, there is evidence of phytophthora on some of her trees which is a worry. Another unwelcome visitor is a rather attractive hare.

George Sevastopulo took us on a walk to Monte Stino, the ‘epicentre’ of *Daphne petraea*, near lake Idro in Northern Italy. We saw a lovely meadow with, among others, polygala, linum, euphorbia and orchids. George showed us closeups of the flowers of centaurea and phyteuma, pointing out the exquisite detail of their flowers and a nice shot of a butterfly on a scabious flower. Apart from its flowers this area has great historic interest as it was the front line in WW1 and saw great loss of life not just from the fighting but also from cold and hunger. We read a sad poem written by one of the participants which is reproduced on a memorial.

In April Barbara O’Callaghan visited the Keukenhof Gardens, Amsterdam, which open only from mid-March to mid-May. The displays

of tulips and narcissi were spectacular with rivers of flowers. Apart from the bulbs there were nice drifts of hostas, saxifrages and epimediums. The gardens were quite crowded on her visit. We also saw some shots of the amazing tulip fields.

Liam McCaughey took us to N.E. Turkey and the Pontic Alps. The area is on the Black Sea coast and borders Georgia and Armenia. It is wet near the coast but dry inland. We saw quite a few plants including *Lilium ponticum*; *Ajuga orientalis*; *Corydalis alpestris*; *Aster alpinus*; and *Stachys macrantha*. Beekeeping is extensive in the area. There is a huge amount of road and dam construction along the Çoruh river which somewhat hampered progress. Higher up we saw gentians, poppies, glaucium and digitalis. At one stage Liam and Joan got a scare when they became the focus of a large black bull. A nice shot of a huge group of blue butterflies was rather spoiled when Liam pointed that they were congregated on a pile of horse dung.

Jamie Chambers finished by showing some slides of his trip to the Dolomites in June 2019, a trip he enjoyed greatly. The scenic images were very impressive, and we saw lots of fine plants, too many to list here. Some highlights were *Physoplexis comosa*; *Saxifraga oppositifolia*; and the delightful *Linaria alpina*. But we also enjoyed daphnes, gentians, dianthus, rhododendrons, clematis, soldanellas, pulsatillas, crocus and paris among others. A fitting end to the Informal Slide Show and time to repair to the bar for some relaxation.

Julian Sutton

Julian is a consummate plantsperson and an experienced and sought-after lecturer. His first talk, 'Beneath the trees' opened proceedings on Saturday morning. As the title suggests the talk dealt with woodland gardening. In nature, a forest is a multi-layered structure: first come the tall trees, e.g., pines; then, the under-storey trees, like *Cornus nuttallii*; followed by the shrub layer, e.g., *Chrysolepis sempervirens*; and finally, the herb layer, plants such as *Micromeria douglasii* and bulbs. This is the layer that most concerns us as gardeners, and Julian went on to describe many desirable plants that like woodland conditions. I can't mention them all but will give you the highlights. He started with our native primrose,

Primula vulgaris, and showed some of the many variations that occur in this species where flowers can be yellow, white or green; or pink or purple, but, also yellow in *P. v.* subsp. *sibthorpii*. Double flowers also occur as in *P. v.* 'Dawn Ansell'. Primroses benefit from a topdressing of leafmould from time to time.



Cantleya spicata, probably the best ginger for our climate, is excellent in semi-shade. Roscoeas, although dormant for much of the year, are excellent woodland plants. They need good drainage in winter and water in summer. Julian finds that three good waterings through the summer keeps them happy. *Thalictrum kiusianum* (above) is often grown in pots and struggles there. It thrives outside in a woodsy soil as Julian's photo shows. Trilliums, of course, are classic woodlanders, but those with a stem between flower and leaf, e.g., *T. flexipes*, are very prone to slug damage in our gardens – not so in the wild as most molluscs in the US are not herbivores. Other species such as *T. luteum* and *T. kurabayashii* are

less susceptible. We should never buy trilliums as bulbs as, more than likely, they have been dug up in the wild – this is legal, but shouldn't be, in many parts of the US. *Maianthemum salvinii* is very nice, it's hardy but can be damaged by late frosts. *Lophosoria quadripinnata* needs space but it is a lovely fern, one of my favourites, with its attractive blue colouring on the back of the fronds.

The smaller anemones are ideal in woodland, especially *A. nemorosa* in all its different forms and colours, e.g., 'Bowles' Purple', 'Bill Baker's Pink', 'Tage Lundell' etc. *A. blanda* adapts well to woodland conditions. *A. caucasica* does well outside for me but Julian thinks it's best in the alpine house. *Eranthis hyemalis* is indispensable but can be difficult to establish in some gardens. Some of the new strains being produced are very nice but Julian thinks that giving them cultivar names is pointless. Among hepaticas he considers that *H. transilvanica* and *H. meadia* are best. *H. nobilis* and *H. japonica* do poorly in the garden. *H. × meadia* 'Millstream Merlin' is "growable".

Hellebores are useful and tolerate summer drought. Apart from cultivars of *H. × hybridus*, Julian recommends *H. dumetorum* and *H. purpurascens*.

Good foliage plants for woodland conditions are *Beesia calthifolia*; *Coptis japonica* var. *major*, good seedheads too; *Actaea rubra*, a great plant; *Arum maculatum*; *A. italicum* 'Marmoratum', grows in deep shade; and *A. i.* 'Yarnells' and 'Chui' are very good. Arisaemas recommended are: *A. consanguineum*, *A. taiwanense*, *A. urashima* 'Soshin' and *A. kiushianum*. They are best grown like potatoes: lift and dry the bulbs in winter. Chinese forms of epimedium don't like wet winters or dry summers; *E. aff. wushanense* 'Spine Tingler' is easy and attractive and there are other good forms. *Podophyllum versipelle* has good foliage but *P. delavayi* is better. *Caulophyllum thalictroides* is a striking plant especially in early growth, and is easy, as is *Jeffersonia dubia*. Not so *Ranzania japonica*: it is hard to establish and will not tolerate any sun – maybe growing it in pots kept dry in winter and dryish in summer would work, Julian suggests.

On snowdrops Julian recommends growing only those that are distinctive, sound advice, I think. Of the cultivars he showed us I would pick 'Nothing Special', 'Trumps', and 'Godfrey Owen'.

Scillas are good, who would be without *S. sibirica*! If you have space, the bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* can delight (See p.41) and you will either love or hate *H. 'Amy Doncaster'*. We saw a few lilies, *L. xanthellum var luteum*, *L. langkongense* and, especially, *L. 'Eileen North'* appealed – Julian recommended the ‘North’ range of cultivars. There are two distinct lines of *Erythroniums* in the US: east and west – the western ones are easier. *E. hendersonii* is lovely and *E. 'Kevin Marsh'* (see p. 44) is a very good cultivar. *Disporum uniflorum* can't be ignored and Solomon's Seals, like *Polygonatum yunnanense* and *P. arisanense* are worthwhile.

In setting out to create a woodland garden we need to ask ourselves what we're trying to achieve. In a large woodland garden we can have a mix of easy plants like the lovely *Tulipa sprengeri*, hardy geraniums, ferns and chrysoplenniums interspersed with highly cultivated patches for the fussier ones such as *Anemonella thalictroides* ('Betty Blake' is lovely). A large garden takes time. Julian is impressed with the experimental woodland development being carried out by the RHS. On a domestic scale, whatever your plan, you need lots of leafmould, so collect autumn leaves, oak and beech are best, stamp them over and let them rot down. Topdressing your woodland beds regularly with rotted leaves will greatly improve your chances of success. You will need shade, so start with a



tree or a hedge, adapt the area and think about soil and soil structure. The key is humus, humus, humus.

Fungi also play a role. The last plant Julian showed us was *Pterospora andromedea* (left) which looks like a parasitic plant but isn't, at least as the term is normally understood, i.e., needing a host plant. Instead *Pterospora* feeds on the mycorrhizal fungi in the great mycorrhizal network that occurs in forests which connects the trees to each other and plays a significant role in

maintaining their health. Isn't nature just amazing.

Julian's second talk was titled 'A plantsman's guide to the American West'. He started by giving us a great deal of geographical and geological information about the American West so that we would have a full understanding of the focus of the talk. I will try to summarize. The area involves the US only, excluding Canada and Mexico. 100° west is the beginning of the true West and the area stretches from Cozad, Nebraska to Cape Mendocino, California. The division is significant biologically and culturally. His first two plant images were of *Gentianopsis crinita*, which is strictly eastern and *G. thermalis* which grows only in the west. He talked about the tectonic plates underlying the region and how the mountains and volcanos were formed. The mountain ranges involved, including the Columbia and Colorado plateaus, are the Rockies, the Cascades, the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges. A graphical representation of the mountains and a photo from NASA showed clearly the density of the ranges, making what Julian described as a "washboard terrain". And so, to the plants.



A number of the silene species in the region are narrow endemics whereas *S. acaulis* runs the length of the Rockies and is widespread in the Northern Hemisphere. *Ss. hookeri*, *hookeri* subsp. *pulverulenta*, *bolanderi* and *serpenticola* are much showier plants than *S. acaulis* but more difficult to grow. *Calochortus gunnisonii* is nice and, interestingly, saved many an early settler from starvation. There are several species of lupins in the region. They are growable in our gardens, but not as perennials and not in character. We should treat them as annuals or biennials. *Geranium viscosissimum* which is semi-carnivorous and grows in wetter areas is nice in a sunny border. *Actaea rubra* can have white or red berries and is very nice. *A. pachypoda* is similar (nicer, I think) but is a purely eastern plant.

At the alpine level we have *Tsuga mertensiana* and *Pinus longaeva*, the Bristlecone Pine, and in winter up to thirteen feet of snow. Alpines include the variable *Eriogonum ovalifolium* var. *nivale* and *E. caespitosum* which has nice silver foliage but few flowers. *Cistante umbellata*, Pussy Paws, is nice but outshone by *Lewisia* (*Lewisiopsis*) *tweedyi*. *Claytonia megarhiza* var. *nivalis*, (above) a so-called ‘iceberg plant’ because there’s more underground than above, is very nice but strictly for the alpine house in a long tom. *Sedum lanceolatum* is pretty. *Erythronium grandiflorum* is nice but difficult/impossible to grow; the growable erythroniums like *E. revolutum* come from lower altitudes. Around the wet margins of glacial lakes can be found *Caltha leptosepala*, *Trollius albidus* and *Kalmia microphylla*. *Veratrum californicum*, a stately plant, grows in mountain meadows.

There are some very dry, desert areas in the region but the degree varies. The Sonoran Desert gets some rain and has an extensive range of cactus species including the rather unprepossessing *Opuntia polyacantha*. On the high plains we find the attractive *Argemone polyanthemos*, growable but only just. There are lots of astragalus as well as agaves, the Judas Tree and the miserable looking Mesquite, *Prosopis glandulosa*. Moving to Steppe conditions we see the easily grown *Eschscholzia californica* en masse in the fine photo that Julian showed. The annual *Platystemon californicum* is attractive as are the several clarkia species, especially *C. springvillensis*. The miniscule *Mimulus nanus* is “a very sweet little plant”.

The Pacific NW gets a lot of rain resulting in lush coniferous forests. *Picea sitchensis*, the Sitka Spruce, which gets such a poor press in this country, seems a different plant altogether when it's allowed to grow to maturity. These forests have a large understory with plants such as *Mahonia aquilifolium* somewhat spoiled by our common ivy which is an invasive exotic there. Other plants there are *Amelanchier alnifolia*, *Rubus spectabilis*, *Ribes sanguineum* and ferns such as the excellent *Polystichum munitum*. Other nice ferns are *Polypodium glycyrrhiza* and *Adiantum aleuticum*. *A. a.* 'Japonicum' is Julian's favourite hardy fern.

The giant sequoias are magnificent as are the many different species of pine some of which are very specific to particular locations. The trees are threatened by fire and disease. Climate change is allowing pests like bark beetles to reach higher altitudes where the trees have no natural resistance.

On the origin of plants in the region very few originate in South America; some come from South Africa, such as *Calandrinia ciliata*; some from Asia, like the beautiful *Aquilegia jonesii*, difficult to grow, almost impossible to flower. *A. laramiensis* is much easier and *A. formosa*, and *A. flavescens* easy. All have different pollinators.

Julian finished this fascinating talk with images of a number of penstemons. Penstemon is an "All American" genus with many decorative species for all altitudes. Two good species for alpine lovers are *P. newberryi* and *P. davidsonii* (see p. 44). The photos are Julian's.

Hester Forde

I don't think Hester would object to being referred to as a 'plantaholic' because she is, albeit a very discriminating one. Any plants admitted to her garden must be the best form of that plant that's available, and she is always on the lookout for exciting new introductions. Her talk focused on her lovely garden, Coosheen in east Cork, which is full of an eclectic range of the finest plants some of which she shared with us. The garden is about one third of an acre, is windy, has an average annual rainfall of forty-two inches, with free-draining soil. Frost is rare. Hester opens her

garden to visits from groups, local and international, and gets many visitors.

Hester believes that to truly know a plant you must grow it; you must know the conditions the plant requires; and you should always buy from a good source. She has reservations about buying plants that are micro-propagated. Space does not permit me to mention all the plants she showed us, so I have to be a bit selective.

Her opening images were of general views of the garden and I have no doubt that people in the audience who hadn't visited added a visit to Coosheen to their wish list. Hester grows a number of sheffleras all of which are nice, but my vote goes to *S. taiwaniana*. Apart from its graceful habit it has attractive flowers and berries. Her favourite tree is *Acer griseum* and acers generally do well for her; an occasional seaweed tonic may be beneficial. We saw a number in their brilliant autumn garb and *Acer palmatum* 'Mikawa Yatsubusa', which is tiny and slow growing, is ideal in a rock bed. Removing the lower branches from an acer opens up the possibility of underplanting. Hammamelis should be pruned after flowering, her favourite is *H. 'Aphrodite'* which has a great scent. *Calycanthus × raulstonii* 'Hartlage Wine' (below) is a lovely shrub and likes dappled shade. 'Merveille Sanguine' is a favourite hydrangea.



Like Julian, she likes to grow the more striking forms of snowdrop. Of those she showed us I liked *G. 'Elizabeth Harrison'*. She has to be something of a galanthophile, though, as she is one of the leading lights behind the very popular annual Snowdrop Gala. Polypodiums go well with snowdrops as do hellebores of which she has a large collection. She removes the foliage in November.

Among the small bulbous plants she likes are *Iris reticulata* 'Painted Lady', *Crocus mahyi*, *Muscari* 'Grape Ice' and *Fritillaria* 'Craigton Cascade'.

Cypripediums need cool, moist, humus-rich soil and shade – no direct sun. Hybrids like *C. 'Kentucky Pink Blush'* are lovely and relatively easy.

Persicarias and podophyllums are great foliage plants and foliage is very important for Hester; look out for *Persicaria* 'Brush Strokes' and *Podophyllum* 'Kaleidoscope'. *Beesia calthifolia* and *Impatiens omeiana* 'Pink Nerves', a bit of a spreader, are excellent in this context also.

Among camassias, for Hester the best is *C. 'Electra'*. She loves dieramas and grows a number but finds them hard work and they are prolific seeders. Groups of pots planted up with different plants are a feature in the garden. Recently Hester has started to experiment with forms of *Begonia rex* in these pots and has had some lovely displays. They do best in dappled shade, and she finds them worthwhile.

Like many of us she is very fond of roscoeas and has a good collection. They hate dry conditions while in growth and dislike full sun. As well as the species a lot of new forms like *R. purpurea* 'Brown Peacock' have become available in recent years.

Dahlias are a significant feature in the garden in late summer and autumn providing a great range of colour and some have striking foliage. They are long-flowering and provide a continuous supply of cut flowers. She lifts the tubers in winter and stores them in dry compost. Favourites are 'Labyrinth' and 'Kenora Macop'. Kniphofias and salvias mix well with dahlias, the latter being particularly good later in the season. *S. 'Amistad'* is "super" and *S. 'Phyllis Fancy'* is "a must". Very worthwhile also are hedychiums which give a tropical look. *H. 'Shillong Ghost'* is special. Cannas are another staple and give that tropical look

also. She lifts most of them in the winter but *C. chemannii* has survived outside for years. *C.* 'Eric Nubert' is excellent.

Grasses are important in the garden. *Chionochloa rubra* is the best. Other strong recommendations are *Panicum* 'Cheyenne Sky', *Pennisetum* 'Black Beauty' and *Miscanthus* 'Silver Sceptre'. Hester is a fan of Keith Wiley and his garden, Wildside, and she showed us a few shots from there showing how he uses grasses. Asters, now *Symphiotrichum*, are great in autumn. Try *S.* 'Les Moutiers'.

Hester ended her absorbing talk by telling us that she has recently rediscovered fuchsias and showed us a few that she really likes. You won't go wrong with *F. hatschbachii*.

This was an excellent talk from a passionate gardener which should provide inspiration for anyone interested in giving their garden a facelift and the photos are Hester's.

Johan Nilson

Johan's first talk was entitled 'Bulbs and alpine at Gothenburg Botanical Garden' (GBG) in the course of which he showed us what all visitors to the garden see, and also behind the scenes where all the work is done. I had the pleasure of being shown around the garden a few years ago by Henrik Zetterlund (HZ) and it made a profound impression on me. This talk reminded me of what a wonderful place it is. The garden's centenary falls in 2023 and preparations are in hand to mark the occasion.

Johan introduced us to the garden with a number of shots of the rock garden in May, c. 6,000 plants, mainly wild sourced; the bulb house, fourteen raised beds with sand plunges, housing some 5,000 pots of bulbs mostly from steppe regions; the alpine house at different times of the year full of alpine plants and bulbs with woodland plants in the shaded sides; and the Per Wendelbo (PW) Memorial Bulb Garden. The great Per Wendelbo (1927-1981), an inspirational former Director of the GBG, was a Norwegian botanist, author, plant collector extraordinaire who had an enormous influence on the garden and is still spoken of with reverence. Many plants were named after him. He was a great expert in and collector of dionysias and published a monograph on the



genus in 1961. We saw a number of views of the dionysia house packed with these wonderful but difficult plants. Forty of the fifty known species are grown in the garden. One of Johan's favourites is *D. esfandiarii* (above).

We made a brief visit to Wyoming to see *Clematis tenuiloba* and *Kelseya uniflora* in the wild. They are both grown in the GBG and HZ named a particularly fine selection of the clematis, 'Ylva', after his daughter.

We moved to the propagation house where a great many plants are propagated from seeds and cuttings. We saw lovely images of the results, featuring choice alpines such as pulsatilla, campanula, androsace, paraquilegia, lewisia and more. Johan is fond of *Lewisia rediviva* which they grow outside. A lovely compact form of *Edraianthus owerinianus* also survives outside.

HZ crossed the lovely *Primula renifolia* with *P. megaseifolia* resulting in a new cross called *P. x gothoburgensis* which is a super, strong growing plant. Johan generously donated one for the auction.

We revisited the PW Memorial bulb garden to see some of the plants in flower. We saw some lovely corydalis, *C. henrikii* and *C. afghanica*. The yellow *Paeonia wendelboi* (see p. 11) is a gorgeous plant.

Colchicum is an important genus for GBG due to the work carried out over thirty years by Karin and Jimmy Persson. There are 100 species, 50% flowering in autumn and 50% in spring and GBG has the most comprehensive collection in the world. Many of the species are lovely but Johan likes *C. svovitzi* which is good in the garden and *C. figlalii* is beautiful.

Many Juno irises are very beautiful but also very difficult. *I. persica* is nice but variable and *I. stenophylla* 'Heldreichii' is gorgeous. Crocuses are grown in 9cm pots, 850 of them in the crocus bed. *C. × gothoburgensis* (*C. pelistericus* x *C. scardicus*) is lovely and I would love to own a few corms of *C. scharojanii* subsp. *flavus* and *C. vallicola* 'Blushing Marmot', both autumn flowering. There is a good fritillaria collection which Johan looks after and he finds the genus fascinating. Some special ones are *F. poluninii* and a lovely dark form of *F. alburyana*. *F. pinnardii* 'Ole Sonderhausen', "a lovely plant and easily available", was named after a Dane who died in the 1990's and left his collection to GBG.

Most bulbs are repotted annually in autumn. It is a big job, taking about three months. The work is shared by genus: Johan looks after fritillaries. He enjoys discovering what has happened since the previous repotting. The mix used for most bulbs and for potting on seedlings is made up of sand, mineral compost, peat and grit to which bonemeal and basalt meal are added. Toothpicks, pipe cleaners, and paint brushes are used in pollination. There is a tailored watering regime for the plunges, and they find the use of clay pots very successful. HZ controls the watering of the bulb collection overall, but Johan is responsible for the frits.

A few miscellaneous plants that Johan showed us included a lovely dark form of *Trillium rivale*, a very attractive, small Japanese arisaema, *A. cucullatum*, two small polygonatums, *P. brevistylum* and *P. anomalum*, both lovely but as yet untried outside.

Gothenburg city staged a special exhibition in 2016 called Green World in which GBG participated by staging large bulb exhibits with the individual plants being changed regularly. The objective was to educate the public; it is now an annual event. One plant which must have piqued the public's interest was *Muscari sivrihisardaghlarensis*, very nice but its name does not exactly trip off the tongue.



Johan finished his most informative talk with a number of views of an area dubbed 'The Birch Slope'. In autumn 2015, 150,000 bulbs were planted under some birch trees in the garden and the sheets of colour that have resulted are quite stunning (above). Among the bulbs planted were crocus, corydalis, muscari, colchicum, iris, anemone and narcissus. The citizens of Gothenburg are fortunate to have such a treasure as GBG on their doorsteps, staffed by such dedicated plantspeople, and so far, we've seen little of the rock garden, woodland areas and the peat-walls. Johan took us on a tour of these areas in his second talk called: 'My favourite plants and plantings – the Asian peat-walls and woodlands at Gothenburg Botanical Garden'.

Johan's opening image was of a large, beautiful, very floriferous specimen of *Rhododendron oreodoxa*, one of 350 species and cultivars of

rhododendron grown in the garden. On our way to the Asian peat-walls and woodland we passed through the rock garden which nestles between two ridges. It underwent major reconstruction in the 1990's. It is divided into geographical areas, e.g., the Scandinavian area; the Asian area etc. Johan showed some slides of the plants at different times of the year and we left it with some regret.

Johan has been with GBG for ten years and his responsibilities include looking after the Asian plants. The garden gets around 800mm of rain annually, spread fairly evenly throughout the year. The lowest temperature recorded was -26°C and the highest, 34°C. At the entrance to the woodland area is a large specimen of *Pinus peuce*, important because it provides shade and shelter. Great autumn colour is supplied by plants such as the wonderful *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. There is a natural looking pond with marginal planting. Indeed, the overall objective in this area is to replicate nature as closely as possible. Johan took us on a brief visit to the Himalayas to see plants like the majestic *Rheum nobile*, *R. alexandrae*, which they are trying to establish in the garden, various meconopsis and a natural forest area. Back in the garden we were amazed to see a metres-wide planting of *Pleione limprichtii*.



The extensive peat walls are an important feature in GBG. Alf Evans's book, *The Peat Garden and its Plants* and the peat walls in Edinburgh were an influence. Johan worked with Peter Korn in the past and in 2006 they built peat walls in Pitlochry, Scotland. Peat walls, and the peat beds that they support, provide perfect growing conditions for many beautiful plants some of which may grow but may struggle in a normal garden situation. Examples are *Caltha palustris* subsp. *barthelii*, most meconopsis, some osmundas, *Incarvillea zhongdianensis*, *Juncus membranaceus* and the heavenly *Primula reidii* var. *williamsii*, (above) which I can't keep for any length of time despite all the mollycoddling it is given, and which grows lustily in a large colony outside in GBG.

Johan showed us some gorgeous corydalis and fritillaria that love these conditions including the intense blue, *C.s cashmeriana*, *shensiensis* and *mucronipetala*; the pink *C. jingyuanensis*; the lovely yellow, very rare, *C. gorinensis*; and, among the frits, *F. roylei* and *F. cirrhosa*. Johan tries to cultivate as many frits as possible outside. Each year a mulch consisting of equal parts horse manure, peat and sharp sand is applied to all the beds.

Grown from seed, *Nomocharis aperta* and *N. farreri* are lovely as is *Lilium lophophorum*, obtained from Cyril Lafong of the SRGC. Better known lilies, *L. auratum* and *L. speciosum* also do well. GBG has had mixed fortunes with *Thermopsis barbata*, the Black Pea from the Himalayas, which, grown under glass on twelve occasions failed to flower. Planted outside it flowered beautifully after twelve years; two years later it died. I expect they'll keep trying.

Johan showed us more mouth-watering images of meconopsis, omphalogrammas, cremanthodiums; *C. reniforme* has been with them for eight years, and primulas; two worth mentioning are *P. hoffmaniana* and *P. palmata*. Some alliums like the conditions too: *A. ovalifolium* var. *leuconeurum* was given a PC from the Joint Rock Committee in 2016. Some cypripedium species are also happy in the peat beds.

Hanabusaya asiatica, is nice, but a martyr to slugs. *Disporum megalanthum* is a gorgeous woodlander and shouldn't be difficult. *Pyrosia drakeana* is a nice fern and *Helleborus thibetanus* does well. Among anemones, *A. prattii*

is outstanding, “like *A. nemorosa* on steroids”. I was very taken by *Trillidium govanianum* and *Paris thibetica*, particularly the latter. A black corner was inhabited by the brooding, *Polygonatum* aff. *fuscum* and *Arisaema utile*. Among other cobra lilies, a very fine form of *A. griffithii* stood out.

Podophyllum auranticaule is a plant to have but in this genus Johan’s “absolute favourite” is *P. hemsleyi*. *Oresitrophe rupifraga* and *Muckdenia rossii* are desirable but Johan has succeeded in making a cross which is even nicer – superb autumn colour. Johan made the point here that while he may have enthused about particular plants all those that he showed us are his favourites.

We then looked at some of the newer peat walls and their plants. A shot of *Gaultheria* aff. *nummularioides*, a plant that Alf Evans described as being designed for peat walls, proved his point. *G. trichophylla* with pink flowers and blue berries is much showier. Rhododendrons and cassiopes exult in the conditions as do shortias. As the latter age they tend to produce fewer flowers; they recover well when cut back.

Schizocodon soldanelloides, white, and *S. s. var. magnus*, pink, love peat and grow en masse in these beds. Partnered with *Dactylorhiza* \times *fuchsii* or *Pleione limprichtii* they make an unforgettable picture. *Diapensia lapponica* subsp. *obovata* grows well but is shy flowering; *Pyxidanthera barbulata* is dainty and, his final slide, *Berneuxia thibetica* (see p. 39) is one plant that Johan would not be without.

In his two most enjoyable talks Johan gave us a fairly comprehensive picture of this fabulous garden. We have been talking about arranging a visit for some time and perhaps these talks will be the catalyst to make it happen sooner rather than later.

That was our Alpine Weekend for 2019. Next year we have Vojtech Holubec, Jim Jermyn and Brendan Sayers. With a line-up like that we can expect an occasion as least as good as the best of past weekends. You should come along.

Billy Moore

Christmas Miscellany, 5 December

The usual festive atmosphere that prevails on these occasions was completely unaffected by the failure of the non-alcoholic mulled wine to turn up. The excellent cups of tea that replaced it served very well to wash down the abundance of mince pies and other treats supplied by several members to whom we are very grateful.

Jamie opened proceedings by outlining the programme of events for 2020 which was, rightly, applauded by the audience.

He was followed by Frank Lavery who is moving house, and who has been very busy for weeks lifting plants that he wished to bring with him. Frank also invited members to come to his house and help themselves to some of the many plants that won't be going to his new home. He offered the participants bags full of bulbs of giant lilies which were quickly emptied. He showed us a lot of slides of plants from his garden, mainly blue in colour. They included gentians, hepaticas, meconopsis, polygala, edraianthus, convolvulus and veronica. He particularly recommends *Cyananthus lobatus* for its ease of cultivation and floriferousness. It is clear the Frank will miss his garden greatly but looks forward to creating a new one at his new house. Moving away from his garden, a photo of swathes of bluebells on the Saltee Islands was much admired. Frank strongly recommended a visit to the islands to see the wonderful bird life there.

Fionnuala Broughan brought us to gardens in Brittany and Normandy that she and Bernard visited last summer. We saw lots of photos of lovely plants notable for the beauty of their flowers and/or foliage. Of the gardens visited she particularly recommends the *Jardin de Haute Bretagne* in Brittany and the *Jardin Agapanthe* in Normandy. The latter she found really dramatic even though her visit was long before agapanthus blooming time. We also visited Jimi Blake and Seamus O'Donnell as well as her own garden and saw a nice new small trough that she and Bernard have created. She finished with a shot of the great oak in the grounds of Birr Castle. The castle will celebrate its 400th anniversary this year and will stage an eclectic art exhibition in which Fionnuala hopes to participate.

Janet Wynne showed us some photos of good plants in her garden. Among these were thriving specimens of bolax and raoulia but pride of place must go to a very good *Ramonda myconi* in her crevice bed which has been a great success. We also saw a small but very attractive shady bed full of colour. *Saxifraga* 'Ballawley Guardsman' is doing well as is *Primula* 'Julius Caesar' which Janet divides regularly for bits to give away to friends. *Tecophilea cyanacrocus leichtlinii*, a rich blue flower with a white throat was very nice. Her favourite plant, however, is *Physoplexis comosa*. Janet is an expert in cacti and succulents, and she showed some attractive examples of the latter.

Our visit to the Burren this year is in July rather than in May and Triona Corcoran paid a visit in July last year to get some idea of what we might see at that time of year. She emphasized that the stops she made were random and that before we go next July she will have researched the best places to explore. Despite the randomness she saw lots of worthwhile plants including many orchids, *Geranium sanguineum*, Meadowsweet, Thyme, the Burnet Rose, Knapweed, Eyebright, achillea, asperula and helleborines. Among the orchids was the rather rare Bee Orchid. The conclusion is that there will be plenty of wildflowers to see and, of course, Carl Wright's garden will be wearing its summer garb.

Bernard van Giessen followed with a series of beautiful close-ups of various flowers. Several of the photos were taken in Jimi Blake's garden including one of a very distinctive dahlia flower. A shot of a bee on a sanguisorba flower was amazing; as Bernard said he was lucky that the insect landed on the flower just as he was about to take the photo. A picture of cotula flowers and foliage with thyme against a black background was striking. But the image I liked best was of a geranium flower taken from behind with the light shining through highlighting all the tiny hairs on the flower and stems.

Courtesy of Jamie we paid a visit to Brookfield Garden near Christchurch in New Zealand. It was springtime and camellias (NZ cultivars of course) and magnolias were in full flower. The garden is about twenty years old, is devoted mainly to NZ natives, is divided into 'rooms', and includes a long canal and a woodland area. The 'rooms' are

enclosed by tall hedges again using NZ natives including corokia. A grove of Kauri trees (*Agathis australis*), although still relatively young - the oldest Kauri in NZ at present is 2,000 years old and still growing - is fascinating as one has the impression while walking through a Kauri forest of being in a cathedral. These trees, which can grow to 50m tall, shed their lower branches as they grow meaning that a lot of the timber is knot free and therefore much in demand. The NZ population of these magnificent plants was decimated, first by the Maori people, and later by European settlers, both for their timber and the gum they produce. It is now a protected species. On their visit Jamie's family had the garden to themselves and enjoyed the lovely vistas and the huge range of NZ native trees and shrubs it contains. An herbaceous border of natives is notable for foliage colour and texture rather than flowers. For me and many in the audience the most desirable plant shown was a beautiful large fern with blue fronds, *Blechnum novae-zelandiae*.

George titled his offering: 'A rock garden beneath the waves', and I can safely say that it was the most remarkable of the evening given that the images he showed were taken at 3,000m below sea level in the mid-Atlantic. The images and video came from a bathymetry survey of the Charlie Gibbs fracture zone. The cameras and lights were mounted on a remotely operated vehicle (ROV). We saw a graphical representation of an underwater mountain range as well as images of the many creatures that live at these depths such as sea cucumbers, sponges, starfish, corals and coral relatives. When viewed on the sea floor these colourful creatures could be imagined as plants growing among the rocks scattered about - some of them looked quite plant-like. George raised the question as to why these creatures are so colourful given that it is normally pitch black at these depths, but nobody knows. He finished his fascinating presentation with a video of some of the fish that live there as well as an arresting sequence showing an ROV with its mechanical grab clumsily trying to pick up rock samples to the alarm of a tree-like orange-coloured creature which, gracefully waving its many branches rose from the ocean floor and made its escape.

The fact that George's presentation was plant-less did nothing to reduce its appeal to the audience and there were plenty of questions afterwards for him.

This is by far the longest account that I've given of a Christmas Miscellany and I think it's because the sophistication and professionalism of the contributions have risen considerably in recent years. In fact, I would have liked to say more about a number of them but for the limitations of time and space and I apologise to any of the presenters who may have felt that they got short shrift.

Following the presentations there was a lot of animated conversation over the mince pies and tea before the exchange of seasonal greetings as we all went our separate ways looking forward to getting together again in 2020.

Billy Moore



Berneuxia thibetica – see p. 35. (Photo: Johan Nilson).

FIXTURES

Thursday, 16 January, 8 pm. **AGM** followed by **Carmel Duignan**, ‘The Making of a Plant Anorak’. Mount Merrion Community Centre. **Note new venue – see p. 7.**

Saturday, 8 February. Visit to **Angela Jupe’s** garden to see snowdrops. See booking documentation.

Saturday, 22 February, 12 noon. **Annual Lunch**, preceded by **Paddy Tobin**, ‘Thirty Years as the Undergardener’. Royal Irish Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire.

Thursday, 19 March, 8 pm. **Kevin Hughes**. ‘Using Rock Garden Plants outside the context of a Rockery’. Joint with **IGPS**, NBG, Glasnevin.

Saturday, 21 March, 2 pm. Local Show, members plant sale and workshop. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan. **Note venue.**

Saturday, 4 April. **Ulster Group AGS Show**, Greenmount College, Co. Antrim.

Saturday 25 April, 1.30 to 4 pm. **Dublin Group AGS Show**. Cabinteely Community College, Cabinteely, Co. Dublin.

Thursday 21 May, 8 pm. **Jim Almond**, ‘Primulaceae in Pots’. Mount Merrion Community Centre.

Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 July. **Burren Trip**. See booking documentation.

Thursday, 15 October, 8 pm. **Ken Cox**, ‘Woodland Gardens’, joint with **IGPS**. NBG, Glasnevin.

Thursday, 5 November, 8 pm. **Ger van den Beuken**, ‘Cushions’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan. **Note venue.**

20 to 22 November. **37th Alpine Weekend**, An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth. Speakers: **Vojtech Holubec**, **Jim Jermyn** and **Brendan Sayers**.

Thursday, 10 December, 8 pm. **Christmas Miscellany**. Mount Merrion Community Centre.

More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 6.



Hyacinthoides non-scripta – see p.23. (Photo: Keith Hulbert & Paul Zanucki.)

NOTES

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Top, *Penstemon davidsonii* (see p. 26) and, bottom, *Erythronium* 'Kevin Marsh'. (see p. 23). (Photos: Julian Sutton).