



# Alpine Garden Society Dublin Group

[www.alpinegardensociety.ie](http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie)



**NEWSLETTER NO. 72 – SUMMER 2019**

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Front cover illustration is of *Cypripedium calceolus* in northern Italy. (Photo: Billy Moore)

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

As I write the sun is shining and there are lots of jobs to be done in the garden; it's tempting to go out, but I must persevere with the newsletter as deadlines loom. 2019 has been a difficult year for plants with a mild winter, a cold spring and a cold early summer. For me the result was that some plants flowered far too early and others much later than usual. Not really a problem in the garden but frustrating where show plants were concerned. Last summer was lovely but I lost quite a few plants from drought, including an irreplaceable twenty-five-year-old rhododendron, *R. bureavii*, possibly my favourite plant in the garden. The white flowers are nice, but the plant is most notable for the rich copper-coloured indumentum on the backs of the leaves and the striking new foliage in summer – see photos on p. 37. Because of the water shortage and the hose ban I watered sparingly and conserved water as much as possible in the house, but I should have been a bit more generous to my poor rhododendron. This summer so far has not been as dry, but I notice some plants in the garden are under stress and I would like to see more rain – during the night of course. Meanwhile, I will water carefully concentrating on the more vulnerable species. Hard to believe that there was a time when we watered our lawns!

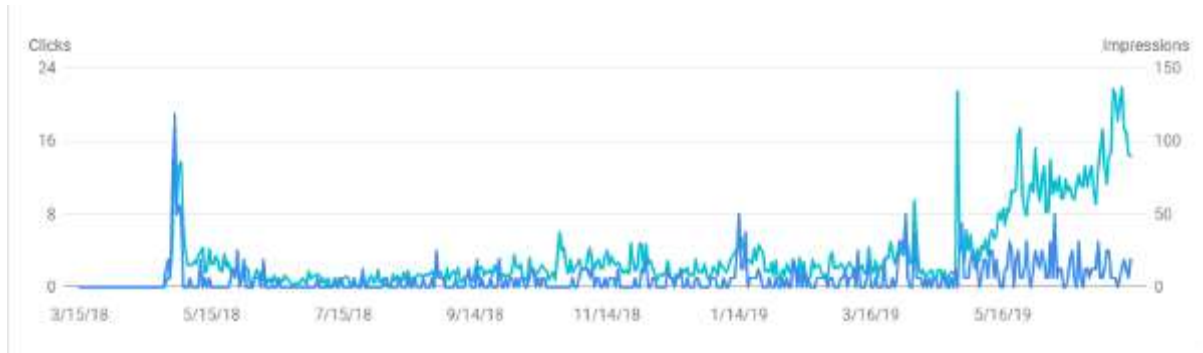
2019 so far has been a good year for the Group: we had interesting and stimulating talks, the shows were excellent despite the weather, and the trip north was a success. As usual I must thank those members who contributed reports on the various events with a special thanks to first-timers Mary Harty and David Power. Mary hit a record by sending her report, not within days, but within hours of being asked!

### **The Website**, from Jamie

The new website is no longer quite so new (we went live in April last year), and Fionnuala and I have been ironing out the bugs, with help from sharp-eyed committee members. I hope you are all able to find and use the site with ease - we moved it to a new host recently to make it more responsive. You should also be able to use it on your mobile phone with no problems.

Overall, our appearance in search results is growing (see the green line in the graph) - it seems more people are finding us now and are actually coming to the website. Not that we have massive traffic - generally only

a few clicks a day (the blue line) except around the time of the Show. The most popular pages are the Newsletters - there are a lot of downloads of newsletters from earlier years. I'm not surprised, given the quality of the publication you now have in your hands! (Thank you, Jamie. Ed.)



Now that we have a modern website, I would appreciate any comments you might have about it, including what you don't like, or what is missing. The advantage of the new site is that it doesn't take much work to add new information to it. So, if you have suggestions for changes, please let me know. I'll organize a Q&A at one of our meetings to get your ideas.

Don't forget you can always email the Society using the [info@alpinegardensociety.ie](mailto:info@alpinegardensociety.ie) address. And go and look at the website now at [alpinegardensociety.ie](http://alpinegardensociety.ie) to see what you think.

### **AGS Library**, from Jamie also

The committee decided last year that it was to everyone's benefit to merge our library of specialist alpine books into the RHSI library at their headquarters, Laurelmere Cottage, Marlay Park, Grange Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin D16 H9T4, so they would be more easily available. That was completed last year (many thanks to Patricia Maguire for making this happen), so I urge you to take advantage of the new arrangements.

You can view the catalogue online on the RHSI website (<http://www.rhsi.ie/library/>). Books may be searched for on an Author/Title basis. Also, if the tag AGS is used then a full list of the Alpine Garden Society collection may be viewed.

The Librarian is Brede Bennet and her contact details are: phone: 0864075684 and email: library@rhsi.ie. Brede is only there on Mondays, but books may be reserved and held for pickup at Laurelmere (10 to 4 each day except Tuesdays and weekends).

If you take a look at your Fixture List card you will see that it is now your AGS Membership card also. Just take it along and present it when borrowing.

### **Annual Show, from Gavin Moore**

We had an unusual but successful show this year, unusual because the weather was very strange for the weeks leading up to it, unseasonably hot at one stage and then turning unseasonably cold. At one point it seemed as if plants would be very early, and then suddenly they were late and, in the case of many of my plants, they eventually did nothing. As a result, the quantity of plants was well down on previous years, however, the quality was not impacted. We had healthy competition for all the major awards, including in the Novice Section. The really good news was that we had several new exhibitors in that section whose plants were of exceptional quality and could have been staged in any section.

Financially, the show was a great success with increased takings in all areas. Next year, we have the later show, and usually this is the larger of the two Irish shows. Hopefully, we'll get even more new exhibitors in 2020 and, to that end, now is the time to start planning your exhibits.

There are three things that you can do in the coming weeks to get plants ready for next year. First, if you are a new exhibitor, it is very possible to acquire a plant now, and have it ready for the Novice Section in spring. With the right treatment and some luck, it could be on the show bench in April. The second thing you can do is re-pot any suitable plants now so they can avail of refreshed compost for a few months before slowing down for the winter. Even if they don't need a bigger pot, for most alpines you can shake off some of the old compost and replace it. For example, primulas will always benefit from new compost as they rapidly deplete the nutrients they need. Finally, the easiest possible way to acquire an immediate show plant is to buy bulbs in August or September. There are many narcissus and tulip varieties that are guaranteed to flower in the spring, and all that is needed is a little luck with timing on the day. We'll be publishing a list of suitable and available bulbs later in the summer by email with instructions for their care.

I wish all exhibitors well in the 2020 shows.

Apart from exhibiting there is also the plant sale. Now is the time to be looking around for plants that you can propagate with a view to donating them on the day. Plant sale receipts are very important for the financial health of the Group.

## **Fixtures**

Our first meeting in the autumn is on 17 October at the NBG, Glasnevin when Joanne Ryan (formerly Everson) will tell us about 'Fifteen years hard labour on Kew's rock garden'. Joanne has moved on from Kew and now works for the National Trust as Horticultural Botanist. She is a passionate plantsperson, an experienced lecturer and as Kew's rock garden is among the best in the UK her talk should be full of interest. This is a joint lecture with the IGPS.

On 7 November at St Brigid's our own Martin Walsh will give us a talk on 'A Wicklow walled-garden – reimagined'. As you may recall we visited Kilquade House in 2018 to see the wonderful walled-garden there created by Martin. I think everyone who went on this trip was hugely impressed by what Martin has achieved. This talk will offer an opportunity to members who were not on the visit to get an idea of the magnificence of the garden and the genius of Martin's design and planting. Nothing should stop you from attending this talk.

From 15 to 17 November we will be in An Grianán in Termonfeckin for our 36<sup>th</sup> Alpine Weekend. Our distinguished speakers this year are Hester Forde, well-known to us all; Johan Nilson from Gothenburg Botanic Garden; and Julian Sutton who has spoken to us previously and is a learned plantsperson. This is a great line-up and with all the other attractions that these weekends have to offer should be very tempting to those of you who have not yet been to give it a try. For starters you could put your toe in the water by just coming on Saturday. Full details of the talks and other events are included in your mailout.

Our programme concludes as usual with the Christmas Miscellany on 5 December where we will hear from members about their plant experiences during the year. There will be fun and seasonal refreshments so please come along with a selection of your favourite plant pictures. Jamie will send you all a reminder shortly beforehand.

## **Committee**

We have two new members on the Committee. David Power was elected at the AGM and will be taking over the auditing of the annual accounts. Janet Mathias has been co-opted to the Committee and has taken on the Membership Secretary job (much to my relief: I have been doing it for going on forty years!). Many thanks to Janet and David for agreeing to serve on the Committee and good luck to both of them.

## **Koraley Northen**

I was shocked and saddened to learn of Koraley's death in May last. From Canada originally, she has been an active and popular member of the Group for many years and often entertained us with her artistic plant photos. We will miss her. Our sincere condolences to her family.

## **Brenda Branigan**

And on a happier note, delighted to see that our member Brenda has been elected President of the RHSI. Congratulations to her on this well-deserved appointment.

## **Martin Walsh**

Some more good news. Many members are aware that over the past four years Martin has, in his precious spare time, been working on the garden of his new house near Ashford in Co. Wicklow. During that time, he has been under some pressure from members, including the Committee, to agree to a Group visit to the garden. He has quite rightly resisted that pressure until he became happy with the progress he has made, and the garden had reached the stage where, to his exacting standards, it is worth such a visit. I think we're there.

I visited the garden about four years ago when Martin had yet to start work on it, and he outlined to me broadly what he was planning. On 10 July 2019 Martin invited Anne and me down to see his progress. To say that I was astonished by what he has achieved in the meantime is an understatement. Those of us who visited Kilquade House in 2018 will have an appreciation of Martin's talents in garden design and plantsmanship. All these talents are apparent in his own garden. I was hugely impressed by what I saw. His imaginative design ideas and real genius for creating pleasing plant combinations are evident throughout the garden. He is very much the plant connoisseur and has amassed a superb collection of rare and beautiful plants all grown to perfection. He



has a number of woodland beds which, of course, were past their best at the time of our visit, but given the range and variety of plants in them they must be spectacular in April and May. We discussed the possibility of a Group visit in 2020 and to my delight Martin is agreeable. No details have been worked out yet as to timing, numbers etc. but Triona will get involved and I hope the arrangements can be included in the next newsletter. Unfortunately, as there is very little car parking in the vicinity our visit will have to be by coach.

In order to whet your appetites, I attach a couple of photos that I took on my visit with the caveat that they give little sense of the scale and diversity of the garden. It is a garden that I would be happy to visit weekly.

**Billy Moore**



Gordon Toner of the Ulster Group with his Farrer Medal *Trillium grandiflorum* at the Dublin Show. (Photo: Billy Moore).

## THE SHOWS

### AGS Dublin Show, 6 April

On a cold grey early April morn, we entered Cabinteely Community School where yet again the Dublin Show was being held. There the greyness ended, and the genuine warmth of the Irish exhibitors exuded. While entries were down, due to the most unusual season, the overall quality was excellent. Show secretary Gavin was delighted to tell me that he had three new exhibitors in the Novice Section, always welcome for someone in his position.

It is worth noting that the excellent catering at this show is undertaken by members of the Group with their wonderful range of home baking. This year was no exception, with the Show Secretary's wife, Niamh, in charge for the first time and ably supported by her two young daughters and members of the Group.



A non-competitive display of immaculate bonsai was arranged by the Leinster Bonsai Club, creating much interest, as did the excellent photographs of alpine plants taken by Liam McCaughey and George Sevastopulo. Judging was masterminded by the calm but firm Director of Shows, Martin Rogerson. He and the totally relaxed Show Secretary, Gavin, ensured the smooth running of this the first of two Irish shows of the year. These shows are interdependent and it is evident that the exhibitors (though fiercely competitive) are delighted to meet each other again!

The best plant in the Novice Section, a beautifully grown *Pulsatilla vernalis* (above), was shown by the Montalto Estate and received the Millennium Cup. Grown in a mixture of coir, Vermiculite and top soil, it is grown the year-round in an alpine house. An interesting point of history about Montalto Estate: over 80 years ago, in May 1938, an exhibition of alpine plants was staged at a garden fête at Montalto, then the home of the Countess of Clanwilliam. In one of the greenhouses, a founder member of the Ulster Group took names of people interested in becoming members of the Alpine Garden Society, and in the spring of 1939, those new members organised the first Belfast Show, under the



Society's rules and regulations. Now the new owners of Montalto are endeavouring to revive links with the Society.

The David Shackleton Award, for the best pan of Primulaceae, was won by Liam Byrne with a well grown *Androsace vandellii* (above). This too is kept in the alpine house and grown in a mixture of one part garden compost, one part very fine grit, and one part peat. Liam shades his alpine house from end of April. He was also (and again) the winner of the Jacki Troughton-Smith Trophy, for best pan of Ericaceae, with a beautifully grown *Cassiope lycopodioides* 'Jim Lever'. This plant in its pot

remains outside all the time and is grown in a mix of two parts peat, and one part each of fine grit and garden soil.

The best plant in the Intermediate Section and, as such, recipient of the Waverley Trophy, was Maeve Spotswood's excellent *Rhododendron* 'Blue Tit'. It has always been grown in a pot outside in an ericaceous mix. In the same Section, a nicely grown *Cassiope* Snow-wreath Group (below) won Fionnuala Broughan a first prize in the Intermediate Section. Kept in a pot filled with friable, neutral garden soil and excellent drainage, it stays in the greenhouse over winter.

Billy Moore's beautifully grown *Trillium chloropetalum* 'Bob Gordon' was the public's choice

as best plant in show. This fine specimen has already won two Farrer Medals and is grown in a pot filled with rich woodland compost. Cultural details have been recorded in previous reports. The judges, however, elected to choose Gordon Toner's *Trillium*



*grandiflorum* (see p. 10) as the Farrer medal recipient (his fourth such award). The trillium was also awarded the Margaret Orsi Bowl for the best plant from North America. All Gordon's trilliums are raised from seed, mainly received from Bob Gordon, and are pot-grown in a mix of garden soil and leaf-mould with added blood, fish and bone. Well done Gordon!

All three  
Certificates of  
Merit were won by  
Paddy Smith, the  
first for an  
excellent *Pulsatilla  
campanella* that  
remains outside  
permanently and is  
potted in Paddy's  
own compost mix  
of grit, soil and  
leaf-mould.



Paddy's two other  
Certificates were  
for both pink and  
white forms of *Cyclamen persicum* (see p. 15) in pristine condition. His mix  
for these is 80% grit, 10% leaf-mould and 10% soil, with plenty of  
sunshine in the summer and no feeding. Paddy also won the Ulster  
Group Trophy for three pans grown from seed, these comprising the  
aforementioned *Pulsatilla campanella* (above), *Cyclamen repandum* (back  
cover) and *Gentiana clusii* (below) which he grows to perfection outside



in a mix of  
50% grit, 20%  
soil and 30%  
peat.

Quiet  
background  
music played  
throughout the  
show,  
repeating last  
year's  
experiment,  
and during the  
afternoon  
George  
Sevastopulo

gave a demonstration of planting up alpines which drew a sizeable crowd. Dublin Group members were delighted that there were more visitors than usual at the 2019 show.

I must record a special thanks and congratulations to two ladies, namely Anne Moore and Rose Sevastopulo, who have along with others been responsible for providing the most amazing judges' lunches for over two decades. Now they have decided to 'hang up their boots', so very well done and many thanks. You will be missed!

**Words:** Pat Crossley

**Photos:** Billy Moore





Gavin Moore with his Farrer Medal *Primula henrici* at the Ulster Show. (Photo: Billy Moore).

## Ulster Group Show, 27 April

The tail end of Storm Hannah was crossing the northeast of Ulster as we arrived at Greenmount for the Ulster Group's eightieth show in driving rain and strong winds, not ideal conditions for bringing precious show plants into the hall. One abiding memory is of two exhibitors, one pushing a trolley full of plants, the other bent, holding a large umbrella over the plants, which arrived in the show hall perfectly dry, unlike their owners who were both drenched. Shortly afterwards, as the benches began to fill with beautiful plants the miserable conditions outside were forgotten as exhibitors ensured their plants looked their best and, of course, eyed up the competition. Despite the difficult weather conditions in the weeks

leading up to the Show, with temperatures fluctuating between zero and twenty-two degrees Celsius, the exhibits were well up to standard in terms of quality and quantity. Despite, or perhaps because of, the rotten weather, the



number of visitors was well up, so the Show was a success on all fronts marking its significant anniversary in style. A nice touch was the presentation of a memorial notebook to each exhibitor.

Staging a show for eighty years is a considerable achievement but being Show Secretary for forty of those years must be unique. So, congratulations to the Ulster Group and their Show Secretary, Pat Crossley. Pat and her team, as usual, ensured that everything ran smoothly, and Martin Rogerson kept a keen but friendly eye on the judges.

A display of excellent plant photos from Liam McCaughey and George Sevastopulo was a most welcome addition to the atmosphere in the show hall and was appreciated by exhibitors and visitors alike.

The best plant in flower in the Novice Section was *Leontopodium pusillum* (above), and *Enkianthus cernuus f. rubens* the best pan of Ericaceae, both shown by Montalto Estate, Ballynahinch, which was also awarded the Malcolmson Cup for most points in the Section. As Pat Crossley pointed out in her report on the Dublin Show, Montalto Estate, then home to the Countess of Clanwilliam, played a pivotal role in the staging of the first AGS Ulster Show in the spring of 1939 so it was serendipitous that eighty years later one of the exhibitors at the current show was Montalto Estate. Twenty-four plants were exhibited in the Section which augurs well for the future of the Show.

A well-grown specimen of *Trillium grandiflorum* from Kay McDowell, Limavady, was best plant in the Intermediate Section and the award for most points in the section went to Gordon Finch, Belfast, who had nine firsts.



The Open Section was dominated by the colour blue due to the fourteen gentians staged by Paddy Smith, Navan, whose skill with that genus is well known. The plants included *G. clusii*, *acaulis*, *ligustica*, *angustifolia* (purple), *verna* (blue), *verna alba* and *verna balcanica*. Paddy won the Cowan

Trophy for *G. ligustica* (above); the Garratt Cup for *G. verna balcanica* from seed; the Phebe Anderson for three plants grown from seed, all gentians; the Saxifraga Group Salver for *Saxifraga pubescens* (below); and the Cooke Cup for most points in the Open Section.



Gordon Toner, Limavady, is the star exhibitor of the Ulster Group and was awarded the trophy for the best bulbous plant and a Certificate of Merit for *Trillium grandiflorum* 'Snow Bunting', as well as the trophy for the large three pan class. Gordon exhibits a lot of trilliums which he grows in pots in a woodland compost enriched with blood, fish and bone. A Certificate of Merit was also awarded to a white *Pulsatilla vulgaris* (see p. 21) exhibited by Jim McKnight, Bessbrook. Liam Byrne, Dublin, showed a fine *Rhododendron* 'Ginny Gee' (see p. 21) which was deemed the best pan of Ericaceae. Your reporter won the award for the best plant from Australasia with *Celmisia semicordata* 'David Shackleton' which also got a Certificate of Merit, as did his *Daphne calcicola*.

Gavin Moore, Dublin, received the award for the best plant in a 19cm pot with *Primula reidii williamsii* from seed; a Certificate of Merit for a large pot of *Primula henrici* and a well-deserved Farrer Medal for another pot of the same plant (see p. 16), but a different and more attractive clone. This is a variable species and on some clones the flowers tend to change colour quite quickly after opening giving the plant a ‘spotty’ appearance. The award plant here has pale pink flowers which retain the original colour as they fade and is in my opinion one of the best clones around.

Apart from the plants that received awards of various kinds there were, as always, many attractive exhibits which tend not to be mentioned in show reports.

One such in Ulster was Mr and Mrs George Gordon’s *Potentilla hyparctica* (below), the Arctic cinquefoil. This is a very good garden plant, easy



in full sun and sharp drainage. I grow it in a raised bed where it does very well, but, as the Gordons’ plant shows, it is also amenable to pot culture.

The later April show brings to an end the show season in Ireland and leaves us all, north and south, with a long wait for the next show in early April 2020 which will be in Ulster.

**Words: Billy Moore**

**Photos: Heather Smith**



Above, *Pulsatilla vulgaris* and, below, *Rhododendron* 'Ginny Gee', see p.19.  
(photos: Heather Smith)

## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

### **AGM, 'Fire and Ice – the shared Flora of Iceland and Ireland', Gary Mentanko, 17 January**

Our members may recall that in May 2017, Gary Mentanko spoke to us about his work on the flora of sub-Arctic Canada: this was just the start of ongoing work that Gary has been doing on circum-polar plants – how and where they grow and how they migrate in that part of our planet. Gary's work brought him to Iceland in 2018 and at our AGM at the start of 2019, we were delighted that he came to fill us in on some 'Floral Fire' in Iceland. Gary's entertaining and informative talk not only provided information on a fascinating - though restricted - flora, but also touched on Iceland's connections to Ireland and Canada (specifically Gimli, Manitoba where many of the residents trace their ancestry back to Iceland), on Iceland's history (it was officially 'settled' in the late 9<sup>th</sup> Century), its witchcraft (associated more with men than women), its ethnobotany, its birds, and of course its stunning landscapes.



Gary set the scene by reminding us that Iceland is about a third the size of Ireland. It has four native tree species (Sorbus, Betula, Platanus and Salix), one native mammal (the Arctic Fox), and several migrating bird species that pass through, including Snipe, Skua, Godwit and Tern. These are important in the tale of migrating circumpolar plants as we learnt that seeds can travel with the birds, trapped in their feet!

Part of Gary's work while he was in Iceland included the collection of plants for our own National Botanic Garden's Herbarium: the plants will be preserved with silica gel, which will ensure the endurance of their DNA in the preserved specimens. He worked with colleagues from the Icelandic Forestry Service and Reykjavik Botanic Gardens while he was there. His travels brought him initially to the north of the island, where

the rarest plants are found, and later down to the south, where glasshouses warmed by hot springs provide ideal growing conditions for tomatoes, lettuces etc. At one point there were bananas grown there too – but dreams of a healthy export trade in this exotic fruit were dashed as cheaper transport into Europe from their native habitats became possible.

From Westfjords in the north, Gary showed us *Viscaria alpina* (Alpine Catchfly), *Bartsia alpina*, *Saxifraga cespitosa* and *Lupinus nootkanensis*, which is invasive there. He visited Hólmavík and had some dark tales of witchcraft from that town! At Varmahlíð was the familiar *Caltha palustris* as well as the Bogbean – called the emaciation leaf in old herbals; Thyme – traditionally used for preserving fish (for up to fifteen days); and *Dactylorhiza maculata*, including some subspecies without the characteristic dark markings on the leaves. Gary also found the Blue Mountain Heath, *Phyllodoce caerulea*; the diminutive and beautiful *Harrimanella hypnoides*, also known as moss bell heather; and the red-tipped lousewort *Pedicularis flammea*, a member of the broomrape family.

Gary's recordings of birdsong, tales of witchcraft and plant lore, and his photos of Iceland's unique landscapes rounded out the talk nicely. It's great to hear that Gary will continue his research in Norway, with some sponsorship from our society – we look forward to hearing his next instalment.

**Fionnuala Broughan**

### **Annual Lunch and 'The education of a gardener', Fionnuala Fallon, 23 February**

In the beautiful surroundings of the Royal Irish Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire we were treated to a fascinating talk by Irish Times columnist Fionnuala Fallon. Fionnuala outlined the knowledge required to be a good gardener. How temperature, rainfall and light intensity affect plant selection; identifying nutrient deficiency; importance of soil health; plant propagation; development of skills; importance of using Latin names of plants to avoid confusion; importance of rotation in the kitchen garden to avoid the build-up of pests and disease; the inner workings of the

two-stroke engine to make manual work easier and the influence of organic gardening in the treatment of pests and weeds.

Fionnuala contrasted the garden fashion in 18<sup>th</sup> Century France to impose order and control over nature illustrated by the formal gardens in Versailles with the welcome of wilderness into the city illustrated in the Highline garden in New York city. Most gardeners can identify someone who inspired their interest in gardening, for Fionnuala that person was her father Brian, former Literary Editor of the Irish Times. His role brought a huge variety of books into the house including many on gardening, Beth Chatto, Joy Larcom and Christopher Lloyd inspired. She singled out Russell Page who showed that gardening could be an artform and gave her the title for her talk.

Fionnuala's first garden visit was to Helen Dillion's garden which was a source of early inspiration and learning. Helen's brave colour combinations included pinks of *Cosmos* 'Versailles 'Tetra mix' and Purple loosestrife (rescued from a roadside) with the red of *Rosa* 'Florence Mary Morse'. Helen rates easy to grow geums, red 'Mrs Bradshaw' and yellow 'Lady Stratheden' among her top ten favourite varieties. Inventive treatment of garden material included pruning an apple tree like a bonsai and using water as a mirror to the sky. Self-seeding Mexican fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) softens lines in a path and white foxglove seedlings are identified from their purple counterparts by the absence of a purple flush on the petiole. Echoes of the simplicity of classical buildings in the garden using *Betula albosinensis* 'Fascination'. Reminders of people appear in the garden with the *Rogersia* 'Perthshire Bronze' which came from Helen's childhood garden, and *Itea ilicifolia* courtesy of a cutting from the plant in next door's garden, once owned by the noted plant collector Augustine Henry. Fionnuala alluded to the generosity of gardeners when despite *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Langtrees' not being available for sale, Helen handed her a piece freshly dug and potted. Tanguy and Isabelle de Toulgoët's five-acre garden in Durrow, Co Laois is a study of gardening practices of many civilizations. Tanguy is a



practitioner of biodynamic gardening, planting with the cycle of the moon, and is a great example of the French reverence for food. He uses strings weighed down with stones to train step-over cordons, ties bottles over immature pears which are harvested when pears are ripe and alcohol is added to make a beautiful pear liqueur and the use of roof tiles set at the north of a tomato plant to act as a storage heater to help ripen the fruit.

Lady Puttnam, and her film director husband, Lord David Puttnam, moved to West Cork in the 1980s and their garden was designed by Verney Naylor. With head gardener, Monika Bergerhoff, they installed shelter belts to protect against the salty SW winds and a wildflower meadow was slowly developed using a cutting program to remove nutrients and to encourage the return of wild flowers and grasses. The boathouse is an illustration of planting simplicity with just a single species of *Armeria maritima*. In the walled garden toadflax, *Linaria purpurea* 'Canon Went', is very resilient in dry conditions.

Castletown house garden was designed by the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury, who used an old photo of a French parterre as inspiration for a very formal garden. It takes two men four weeks to cut the box hedges by hand using laser levels. Plywood mock-ups of planned sculptures were used to size the modern commissioned versions produced by Timothy Lees. Local farms were bought up to create a Capability Brown style landscape and white poles were used to identify the most harmonious location for parkland trees in the landscape.

Kilmacurragh, the sister garden to the Botanic Gardens, is host to a wide variety of plants due to the favourable soil conditions and the relatively mild climate. The estate was owned by the Acton family from the 1740s to the early 20th Century and was acquired by the OPW, with Seamus O'Brien as Head Gardener. Seamus has immersed himself in the history of the garden and has reinstated the meadows identified in old paperwork. He used the hardy annual yellow rattle, a parasite, which steals the nutrients from vigorous grasses and now has 130 different species of wild flower and grasses growing in the meadow.

Nicky Kyle, known as the tomato queen, grows hundreds of varieties of tomatoes and has a blog on growing tomatoes in polytunnels. Her focus is on how to have a productive polytunnel throughout the year. As well as the tomatoes she grows courgettes, *Crocus sativus*, figs, cape

gooseberry, strawberry “Albion” all of which grow well in the heat of the polytunnel.

June Blake and Jimi Blake, brother and sister, garden near each other in Wicklow. June is creative and a fantastic colourist, formerly a jeweller which shows in her colour selections. She uses *Tulipa* ‘Red Shine’ which naturalizes through wild grass and *Knautia macedonica* which self-seeds. The garden is good to visit from mid spring to late autumn, especially in the tulip season where 20,000 tulips are on display. Plant history includes the use of *Brunnera* ‘Jack Frost’ a parent to ‘Langtrees’, a rogersia acquired from Helen Dillion and *Dahlia* ‘Procyon Frontier’ from her mother. She gets her Dahlia seeds from Mark Filan of Tuckermarsh Plants, seeds collected from the wild.

Fionnuala has rented out half a Victorian walled garden from a neighbour and uses it as a cut flower garden. The site was overgrown with lots of perennial weeds. She didn’t spray, instead scraped away the vegetation being careful to preserve the soil structure. They covered it in black plastic for six months and rotovated before planting. All flowers are grown from seed, including sweet pea, cosmos, *Tagetes* ‘Cinnebar’, dahlias, Iceland poppy, *Papaver nudicaule*, dill, ranunculus and tulips.

As for all gardeners, Fionnuala’s gardening education is ongoing – and she and we will be learning for the rest of our lives.

Fionnuala’s website is at: <http://flowerfarmersofireland.ie>

**Mary Harty**

### **‘Expanding the collection at Mount Stewart’, Neil Porteous, 14 March**

A large audience enjoyed this talk by Neil Porteous, Head Gardener at Mount Stewart, at the NBG, Glasnevin, sponsored jointly by the AGS and the IGPS. Neil was appointed in 2011 and at once set about arresting the beginnings of a decline in what was once a large, eclectic collection of plants. One of his first steps was to build a propagation unit and to engage a propagator and his objective was to expand the collection by introducing exciting plants sourced from around the world.

Mount Stewart is a National Trust garden situated on the shores of Strangford Lough and was described by Neil as 'a magical place'. It attracts some 250,000 visitors each year. It is worth a visit at any time of the year but the first two weeks in April are best for the rhododendrons and autumn is especially good. As well as the extensive gardens created by Edith, Lady Londonderry (referred to throughout by Neil as Edith, and I will follow suit) there is a fine neo-classical house which is also open to the public.

Growing conditions in the garden are very favourable: the proximity of the lough keeps severe frost away, making it milder in winter and cooler in summer so a wide range of plants can be grown. The mean average winter temperature is 4°C. The soil is a glacial till, 85% sand. Conditions are difficult for rhododendrons, for which Mount Stewart is famous, and they tend to be not as long-lived as in their native habitats. Despite the decline noted by Neil the garden is still host to a wide range of exotic plants an example being the beautifully scented autumn flowering *Schima khasiana*.

It is sometimes thought that the garden was designed by Gertrude Jekyll, but this is not the case: it was solely the brainchild of Edith, although she borrowed ideas from various Mediterranean gardens, but made them personal - the Italian garden is an example. She was an adventurous gardener and was fond of bright colours and strong contrasts and she loved scented plants. Although she employed a Head Gardener and fifteen gardeners, she was a 'hands-on' gardener herself. Neil has researched her background and studied her notebooks and garden plans, some of which he showed us along with some old photographs of the garden. 'Charles the cheetah' was an epithet applied to her husband as a reference to his amatory wanderings and there are some statues of cheetahs in the garden. She had a painting done of herself as Circe the sorceress, a dangerous lady to cross. One has the impression that Neil has reached the stage where he feels he knows Edith, it is clear that he has great admiration for her, and in his plans for developing the garden he tries to imagine what she would do. She made a new rose garden in 1938 which Neil is restoring, and he is trying to source the plants that she grew.

He likes to experiment with plants and layouts in order to keep the garden fresh and has travelled to many parts of the world, sometimes

with Seamus O'Brien, in search of suitable candidates. He takes careful note of how these plants grow in the wild so that he can provide suitable conditions in Mount Stewart. A large part of the talk consisted of slides of many beautiful plants from Arunachal Pradesh to Tasmania (where we saw the wonderful Emu Valley rhododendron garden) which it would be pointless to list here, but I will mention a few later. Many of the plants will have to be grown from seed so it will be some time before they appear in the garden. Meanwhile he is maintaining a detailed database of all the plants being propagated. Some will be propagated from cuttings and even micro propagated. In the process he uses a nursery in Devon owned by the National Trust.

Logan Botanic Garden in Scotland has similar growing conditions to Mount Stewart and the two gardens share a lot of plants. The well-known daffodil breeder, Brian Duncan, donated forty narcissus cultivars. Krug nursery in Wales is also a source of material.

I will end with just a few of the mouth-watering plants that Neil showed us. *Luculia grattissima* flowers in January and has a wonderful scent. *Rhododendron magnificum* lives up to its name and also blooms in January. *R. lindleyi* from Sikkim is gorgeous and also highly scented. *Cyathea dealbata* is a magnificent tree fern, most decorative, as is *Dicksonia antarctica*. Others that I liked particularly were *Stenocarpus sinuatus*; *Podochaenium eminens*; *Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*, the 'Devil Tree'; *Metrosideros umbellata* and *M. stipularis*; *Thyrsopteris elegans*, a lovely fern; and the scented *Rhododendron burmanicum*.

Mount Stewart is a wonderful garden and under Neil's stewardship should get better and better. It is nice to think that he wants to keep faith with what he believes Edith would have wanted and we can all hope that she would approve.

**Billy Moore**

### **Local Show, members' plant sale and workshop, 23 March**

In complete contrast to last year, the weather leading up to the show was ideal for growing Alpines. On my arrival at the Show, it was evident that there would be keen competition on the benches. Magnificent alpines were being made ready and getting final touches from their enthusiastic

and proud owners. If you are like me and new to showing, I can think of no better introduction to exhibiting your plants. Knowledgeable exhibitors, if asked, are happy to share their expertise and guide you in the right direction. The winner of both Best in Show and Most Points was Billy Moore who had some wonderful exhibits. Congratulations Billy.

This year, the workshop was on plant recording and labelling. Janet Mathias took us through her system of recording plant names and details on computer using excel spreadsheets. She discussed the advantages of using a spreadsheet to record relevant details and the various ways the information can be analyzed. George Sevastopulo then took the floor and to general applause, immediately nailed his colours to the mast by denouncing the standard white plastic label as useless due to its limited life of one year. He much prefers Alitag labels for trees and shrubs etc. For seed and alpiners, he suggests using aluminium labels that can be inserted next to the plant. A soft lead pencil is ideal for writing details on the label. He goes further by suggesting writing on the reverse of the label in Indian ink and subsequently spraying the label with a quick drying clear varnish. An internet search of suppliers may be required.



Following the workshop there was the usual rush to be first at the plant sale and care had to be taken not to get knocked over in the stampede. The plant sale was manned (if that is the right term) by Val, Patricia, Mary and Claire who were delighted to give expert advice and relieve you of your money at the same time. Among the many plants on sale were some beautiful varieties of snowdrops and these were snapped up almost straight away. This is a very important source of income for the society and all who donated or purchased plants are thanked for their generosity. Any plants left over from the sale went into the plant sale at our main show on the 6<sup>th</sup> April.

For a long time now, teas and coffees have been a feature of the show and this year was no exception. Rare teas were sourced as far afield as

China and were lovingly brewed by Triona and Mary, ably assisted by David who acted as dog's body and cleaner up and generally did what he was told.

A special thanks to Fionnuala Broughan for organizing the event and for introducing the speakers. Everything went very smoothly, and technology worked without a hitch.

It was a most enjoyable day. For those new to showing, it was a great introduction to the show scene, and I would encourage new members to get involved in this wonderful branch of their hobby. And long-standing members enjoyed getting together and having a chat.

**David Power**

### **‘Blooming Marvellous’, Zoë Devlin, 16 May**

Many years ago, the New Zealand Tourist Board ran a promotion campaign, with the key message 'Don't leave home 'til you've seen the country', urging Kiwis to enjoy the wonders of their own land before rushing to travel overseas. I was reminded of this when listening to Zoë Devlin's interesting and illuminating talk ‘Blooming Marvellous’ about Irish wildflowers. Of course, as our abiding interest in The Burren testifies, many of us already delight in the Irish flora, but Zoë clearly demonstrated how much richer this is than we generally suppose.

But Zoë's talk went far beyond a survey of the flowers to be found in our countryside: her main point, beautifully illustrated by excellent photographs and well-composed slides, was that this national treasury cannot be taken for granted. Of the 1,211 native seed plant species, 204 are threatened in some way (that's nearly 17%), and of these 20 are critically endangered. Habitat loss and climate change are all affecting our native wildflowers, as Zoë described in the first part of the talk.

Some of the endangered (or worse) plants will be well-known to you. Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) is regarded as extinct in



the wild, and Cottonweed (*Achillea maritima*) and Meadow-saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) are endangered, to be found in small numbers in few sites. Not all endangered plants are of great floral merit: the Perennial Glasswort (*Sarcocornia perennis*), restricted to the salt marshes of Co Wexford, is no beauty but, to paraphrase John Donne, every species' death diminishes us. Zoë gave many examples of plants that are under threat, warning us how even those we take for granted in The Burren, such as Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*) and Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*), should not be. Action is being taken - Zoë showed us Cottonweed being cultivated for reintroduction - but for some species such as Oysterplant (*Mertensia maritima*), the underlying cause for the habitat loss is the changing climate.

There have been some success stories. Round-leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium rotundifolia*) is recovering, as are several other species, and Zoë described how the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 is encouraging people to recognize the value of many wild flowers, such as Hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) and Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) to pollinating insects. But, extraordinarily, Ireland is host to a significant proportion (more than 25% in some cases) of the total European population of many species, such as the Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella* ssp. *hibernica*) and the Sand Pansy (*Viola tricolor* ssp. *curtisii*). If we consider things are bad here, how much worse are they in mainland Europe?

The middle part of Zoë's talk looked at Fascinating Plants, where she took us on a tour of the remarkable adaptations plants have made to assist them with pollination, seed dispersal and nutrition. I'm sure we all learned from this part of the talk - I didn't know that Three-cornered Garlic (*Allium triquetrum*) seeds are dispersed by ants, nor that Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) twists its seed capsules around to plant the seeds in cracks - and there were many other illustrations of adaptive strategies. Finally, with more bad news, and particularly embarrassing for Kiwis, Zoë described the Invasive Aliens that are also a threat to native plants in many areas of Ireland. Again, these are often familiar names to us: Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), Giant-rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*) and Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) for example, but some lesser known invaders are also becoming a threat, including the New Zealand Pirri-pirri-bur (*Acaena novae-zelandiae*) which hooks itself to your clothes as you brush past. There were several other NZ plants on her

list! There are also many species that we unthinkingly accept as part of the Irish landscape, but which are in fact alien, such as Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*) and Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*).

I came away from the lecture with a new appreciation of the beauty and interest of the Irish flora, and renewed determination to seek out the many species I've yet to discover. If you missed out on this talk, look out for the next opportunity. Meanwhile, go wandering in the Irish countryside and keep your eyes open. Zoë's three books and her website, [www.wildflowersofireland.net](http://www.wildflowersofireland.net), will be a great help.

**Jamie Chambers**

### **Visit to gardens in Ulster, 18 May**

At 8 am on a cool, rather damp, grey morning a busload of members headed north to visit the garden and nursery of Susan Tindall in Ballynahinch and the garden of Hilary and William McKelvey in Bessbrook. We were lucky that the threatened rain held off, making our umbrellas redundant.

We got a warm welcome from Susan and her husband, Colin, and were treated to coffee and cake before joining Susan on a tour of her well-stocked garden which was full of colour. We were stopped in our tracks by a magnificent tall, pale blue *Abutilon* (below) in full flower. The herbaceous borders were full of interest, a sumptuous Tree Peony attracting a lot of attention, but the extensive, mature woodland garden was perhaps the outstanding feature, despite the fact that many of the spring flowering species were over. Several fine clematis made their contribution. The tranquil atmosphere created by the wide range of trees added to by the huge number of different ferns was very appealing. A very large *Magnolia wilsonii* must have been magnificent at its peak. As in many gardens in Ulster, rhododendrons abounded and included a venerable specimen of *R. keiskii* 'Yaku Fairy'. There were many different epimediums, mostly out of flower but showing how good they are as foliage plants.

Not to in any way overlook the attractions of the garden, it has to be acknowledged that the prime motive of many of the participants was to look for treasures through Susan's extensive and eclectic range of plants in the nursery. This took some time and tested the coach's storage space.



We consumed our packed lunches in Susan's catering facility and headed for Bessbrook marvelling at the amount of work required to keep the garden and nursery in such fine condition. Our thanks to Susan and Colin for a very pleasant couple of hours spent with them.

The McKelvey garden is a delight, beautifully planted and maintained by Hilary and William, and packed with an enormous variety of plants

providing interest at almost any time of the year. There are alpine, woodland plants, bulbs, clematis (a particular passion), shrubs and herbaceous plants many of which can be seen on their Facebook page, The Model Garden. The plants are accommodated in borders, rock beds, a fine crevice bed, troughs, pots and a small alpine house. Hilary is a passionate plantsperson and an inveterate collector with a fine eye for good plants. Some of the plants which particularly caught my eye on this visit were the cypripediums, including a very nice *C. calceolus*; the trilliums among which was a yellow form with nicely marked foliage which Hilary may put on the showbench next year. Lots of clematis, of course, lilies, fritillarias, dwarf irises, rhododendrons, *R. yunnanense* and *R. augustinii* included, pieris, azara and enkianthus. *Rubus* 'Benenden' attracted a lot of attention as also did several specimens of a tragopogon species which seeds around as abundantly as dandelions do and would probably not meet with Zoë Devlin's approval. *Pachystegia insignis* with its white daisies; *Senecio* 'Angel Wings'; and *Phlox* 'Daisy Hill' were lovely. A compact form of *Euryops acraeus* which Hilary says flowers all summer is a fine garden plant.

Following our inspection of the garden we were treated to tea/coffee and a selection of cakes and other delicacies that would do justice to the best bakery – the McKelvey's hospitality is legendary. Our thanks to Hilary and William for welcoming us to their lovely garden. I hope we can return.

I think everyone enjoyed the trip north very much and we must thank Triona for the excellent organization.

**Billy Moore**

### **Propagation workshop with Carl Dacus, 8 June**

There was a good turnout for Carl's workshop on a fine Saturday afternoon in St Brigid's. Carl arrived with a plethora of tools, books and propagating material as well as a projector and screen. His subject was vegetative propagation; he will do a workshop on seed sowing later in the year.

He started by telling us about his background and experience in horticulture and went on to list the various types of cuttings that can be used: softwood; semi-ripe; ripe; hardwood; leaf bud; internodal; mallet;

leaf petiole; leaf cuttings; root cuttings; and layering. Over the course of the afternoon he explained all of these in more detail and demonstrated some of them and circulated detailed notes on the whole process.

He emphasized the importance of hygiene when processing cuttings and covered the use of various tools, e.g., knives, secateurs, sharpeners etc. and when hormone rooting powder should be used. He showed how knives and secateurs should be tested for sharpness and the best way to sharpen them. Plastic bags, perforated for conifers, and fleece for grey leaved plants are useful aids in vegetative propagation. He also discussed micro propagation in some detail.

Members had been asked in advance to bring along cuttings of anything they wanted to propagate, and Carl used these as well as some of the material he had brought to illustrate the process. He made it look easy.

This was a very practical and valuable workshop and we all learned something. The audience was very appreciative of the effort that Carl had put into his presentation, one member saying to me that Carl was a 'real fount of knowledge' on the subject. A very worthwhile afternoon and our thanks to Carl for sharing his knowledge and expertise with us.

**Billy Moore**

## FIXTURES

Thursday, 17 October, 8 pm. **Joanne Ryan (Everson)**, ‘Fifteen years hard labour on Kew’s Rock Garden’. NBG, Glasnevin. **Joint with IGPS.**

Thursday, 7 November, 8 pm. **Martin Walsh**, ‘A Wicklow walled-garden – reimagined’. St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

15 to 17 November, **36th Alpine Weekend**, An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth. Speakers: **Hester Forde, Johan Nilson** and **Julian Sutton**.

Thursday, 5 December, 8 pm. **Christmas Miscellany**. St. Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

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



*Rhododendron bureavii*, see p. 3. (Photos: Billy Moore)



## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

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## NOTES



*Cyclamen repandum*, see p.14. (Photo: Billy Moore)