



# Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

## Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Group



*Rhododendron macabeaeanum*

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018



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**Cover photo: *Rhododendron macabe anum*:** Photo by Tom Clarke

## Editor's note

A big thank you to all those who have been generous with their time and contributed to this issue. The deadline for the Autumn 2018 Newsletter is 14 September. Please see appeal on p. 23 of this issue. I would really appreciate short articles on a wide variety of topics from members and Collection Holders. Contact the editor: Juliet Bloss: tel 023 8084 8085. email: [sevenmeads@aol.com](mailto:sevenmeads@aol.com)

# FAIRWEATHER'S

## AGAPANTHUS OPEN DAYS AT HILLTOP NURSERY

Pay a visit to our wholesale nursery  
Agapanthus Open Days on Saturday 28th &  
Sunday 29th July 2018.

View our National Collection, buy plants, take  
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## Chairman's Letter

Every spring I ponder on the winter just passed. Was it exceptionally mild, exceptionally cold, drier than normal or wetter than normal? This year I thought I could comfortably say, "None of the above applies". I might have spoken too soon. As I write this in the last week in February we are now warned of approaching Siberian weather, "The Beast from the East", with sub-zero temperatures and blizzards, just as we were tempted to think that winter was pretty much over. Consequently, we have spent part of the last couple of days topping up the mulch on the dahlias and cramming stuff that would normally stay outside into the garage. I am confident that the greenhouses will be OK, as each is fitted with fan heaters with independent thermostats, which are much more reliable and accurate than the inbuilt ones. With the clear sunny days, it is surprising how warm the greenhouses can get during the day: over 17°C in one, showing the advantages of double glazing. That should at least buffer the need for heat at night and cut down on the electricity bill. How well the mulched dahlias will do is going to depend on how deeply the frost penetrates.

However, nothing lasts forever and spring is almost upon us as the snowdrops start to go over, the crocuses are at their best and some of the earlier daffs are looking good. The camellias have been performing well for some time, with 'November Pink' still flowering three months after its first blooms opened. I have a feeling, however, that the frosts will turn a dainty shade of pink into a dirty shade of brown.

We have a lot to look forward to, particularly with the lengthening days; I can't wait for the clocks to go forward. Part of the enjoyment will be the excellent series of talks and visits that your events committee has put together. I thought that last year's programme was pretty impressive, but this year's looks even better, and what a start! For those who were able to make the AGM, you will have had the pleasure of listening to John Anderson, one of the best speakers around and certainly one of the most knowledgeable. His views on the need to move forward with gardens and to risk being radical, as well as the need to be somewhat ruthless about what to conserve and what to let go, were enlightening. The latter echoes an abbreviated version of Plant Heritage's mission: 'To help conserve rare plants **worthy of preservation**'; we can't, after all, conserve everything we have ever grown. We very much look forward to visiting the Savill and Valley Gardens in May, to observe first-hand what John has been up to.



As usual we hope for fine weather for the May Plant Fair. We will have a record number of nurseries and we anticipate a big turnout. Over 5,000 flyers have been printed and these are being distributed across Hampshire. Members can do their bit by displaying the ones enclosed at a convenient local outlet. Try to make it, bring a plant for sale and, if you would like to assist on the gate and have not already given your name to Gill Sawyer, please just let any of the helpers know when you arrive.

There are a few things, which I mentioned at the AGM, which I would like to repeat here.

I was pleased to report the great success we had in response to our request for help for Rosie Yeomans in her efforts to support National Collection holders. The assistant volunteers' names are on the back of this newsletter. I thank them most sincerely.



Our membership numbers are steady, and the number of National Collections held in our counties has increased by two to 54.

The National Collection holders' get together at Hillier's was a great success, and we trust that the attendees enjoyed it.

A great deal is going on with the management of the charity, which started with the governance review. This has generated three panels to help us achieve our objectives more effectively, and has moved on to IT and branding reviews. These should all deliver results this calendar year and I look forward to reporting progress in the autumn. The branding guidelines are coming out this week, and, as usual, Hampshire is first off the mark: this newsletter is using the new colours and layout for the cover. Much clearer and less messy, I think. I hope you like it.

There are some really good articles following this introduction. I trust that the reports on events and talks refresh the memories of those who attended, interest those who did not and perhaps encourage more people to make it on future occasions.

I wish you all good gardening for the rest of the year.

***Doug Smith, Chairman***

## Report on Autumn and Winter Events

Thursday 12 October 2017

Talk by Neil Helyer on 'Pest and Disease Control in the Garden and Greenhouse'.

Neil is an entomologist with 25 years' experience in commercial agricultural research. The focus of his talk was the biological control of pests, both the challenges and the successes. The main issue with biological control (the use of predators to reduce pest infestations) is getting the numbers right. Too many predators and the pests are wiped out, the predators move on and the pests return. Too few predators and the pests continue to cause considerable damage to the crop.



Biological control has, for many years, been successfully used to control a number of pests. *Aphidius*, a minute parasitic wasp, native to the UK, lays its eggs inside the bodies of aphids (left), which change colour to indicate successful parasitisation. The wasp eggs hatch and the larvae destroy the aphid, which they

have invaded, by eating it. In a similar fashion, *Encarsia*, (also a wasp) is effective in the control of whitefly. Each tiny insect can lay a single egg in each of 60 to 100 whitefly larvae (right). We are all familiar with the problems of both aphid and whitefly attacks. The honeydew they exude encourages the growth of sooty mould which, in addition to being unsightly, reduces the light available to the leaves.



All good news, as is the development of cold resistant nematodes to control mollusc pests. Neil also explained some of the problems associated with chemical control methods. Regulations change, as do the contents of the products, even if the trade names stay the same. Systemic insecticides, for example, have (unbeknown to many gardeners) vanished from the market.

Best of all, Neil showed us some videos of biological controllers at work. The close-up photography was stunning; a brilliant way to round off a fascinating talk.

Many thanks to Neil for his time and expertise.

**Saturday 11 November 2017**

**Social and talk by Amanda Whittaker, National Collection holder of *Crassula***

Amanda definitely had a plan: to exhibit at an RHS show or two. She started working on her idea in 2015 and in 2016 she presented her wheelbarrow collection of *Crassula* at Chelsea, as part of the Sparsholt College display.

Bursaries then made it possible for Amanda to go to France to the Arrée *Succulentes* nursery in Brittany. Here, propagation techniques were explained and she saw how art forms could emerge from hundreds of module planted cuttings. It was all good inspiration. More thoughts for the Hampton Court 2017 stand soon followed: a Malteser box as an idea for the stand and inspiration from old pots. She received help from Wisley, whose excellent magnification techniques showed up leaf hairs and pores. Nomenclature is very important and must be correct. Amanda's ordered plants arrived from France just two weeks before Hampton Court, all 200 as cuttings, and many as yet unrooted. Much nail-biting ensued.



All ended happily. The carefully dusted and brushed display was well received, looked beautiful and won a Silver Medal. Congratulations to Amanda. For the future, she hopes to learn more about the nomenclature and perhaps take a habitat trip. The talk was a real lesson in how “you can if you try”.

Thanks so much Amanda. The wee ones we brought home are doing really well on a south-east facing windowsill.

(For more information on Amanda's trip to France and some of her designs see the Autumn 2016 issue of the newsletter).



**Thursday 11 January 2018**

**Talk by Bob Gibbons on 'The Most Flowery Places in the World'**

Bob is an author and botanist. He also leads nature tours with a botanical bias, this year to the Algarve, Greece, Croatia, Slovenia and South Africa. Above all, Bob is a brilliant photographer who has had many superb books published.



To get the very best from the wild flowers of the temperate areas it is important for the timing to be right. We saw some marvellous shots of terrestrial orchids in southern Europe (*Orchis speculum* left), migrating painted lady butterflies in the Sahara, irises, tulips and orchids in Greece, and snowdrops, cyclamen and red peonies in Macedonia.



Crete had wonderful anemones, more orchids, as well as a red *Echium*, *E. angustifolium* (right) - new to us all.



We were all in flower heaven as stunning photo followed stunning photo. Gentians, peonies (left) and crocuses in the Dolomites, Californian



poppies on the south-west coast of the USA and examples of the 2,000 species of flowering plants which flourish in the west and south west of South Africa. The sheer scale of the flowering areas was amazing to behold (right).

As an expert on the natural history of France he is unsurpassed. We bought a copy of his *Wild France* at the meeting and we are trying very hard not to lend it to anyone!

With thanks to Bob for a truly floral experience.

**Saturday 10 February 2018**

**AGM and talk by John Anderson entitled 'The History and Plants of the Savill and Valley Gardens'**

John, known to most of us from his days at Exbury, is now Keeper of the Royal Gardens of Windsor. This means he is responsible for Savill (35 acres) and the Valley gardens (around 250 acres), as well as Frogmore, the Queen's private garden, which opens to the public three times a year for charity. He has 35 staff, including 3 students and we think they are all about to be really busy. Savill and the Valley are famous for their fabulous displays of rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias (*Magnolia* 'Eric Savill, right).



John explained how, like most large gardens, Savill needs to make money in order to survive and needs to encourage families to visit. Children's activities are a must these days.

Previous keepers, John Bond and Mark Flanagan, developed the woodland areas where hellebores and primroses grow well. The stream in the Savill Garden is lined with yellow and white skunk cabbage: (*Lysichiton americanus*, (left, now on the list of invasive non-native species), and its white Asian cousin, *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*. These, and their vigorous pale yellow hybrid, are always popular with visitors.



The gardens receive between 22ins and 27ins of rain per year (around 600mm), and in the dry summer of 1976 the Rose Garden suffered badly. This inspired John Bond to turn it into a dry garden. It is now an eclectic mix of plants, almost a Mediterranean garden, needing gentle control to keep its shape and balance. At Savill there is also a luxuriant bog garden with candelabra primulas, gunneras, astilbes and tall ligularias.

On the way to the Valley Gardens, towards Virginia Water, an *Amelanchier lamarckii* walk (right) leads towards more treasures.



A part of the Valley Gardens, the Punch Bowl, was first developed in 1947. Eric Savill gave many returning soldiers work here and an astonishing 50,000 azaleas were planted.

After 70 years, many of the plants are old, tired and overgrown. John is now involved in clearing out large areas and has a cunning three-to-five year plan for replanting. How brave is that?



John is a fantastic speaker. With all his knowledge, he should have two heads! Many thanks John, and we are looking forward to May and our visit.

**Linda Smith**

## Future Events

**Thursday 15 March 2018**

### **Talk by Pat Murphy on the National Collection of *Meconopsis* at Holehird Gardens**

Holehird Gardens is an extensive 10-acre site located close to Windermere, Cumbria. It is the home of the Lakeland Horticultural Society. *Meconopsis* grow well at Holehird due to the relatively cool climate and generally moist conditions. Pat is a very keen gardener and is a volunteer at Holehird Gardens where, in addition to the National Collection of *Meconopsis*, she has a strong interest in alpine plants and snowdrops.

**Time:** 7.30 at Shawford Village Hall,

**Monday Bank Holiday 7 May 2018**

### **GRAND PLANT FAIR. Longstock Park Nursery SO20 6EH**

Our main fund-raising event of the year and the 'Best Plant Fair in Hampshire'. Over thirty specialist nurseries, members' plant stall, hog roast, beer tent etc. Ample free parking. Please bring clearly labelled plants for our sales table. Entry: Free to members, and children; John Lewis employees £2; visiting adults £5.

**Directions:** From Stockbridge: turn right at north end of the High Street. From all directions, follow signs.

**Time:** 10.00am - 4.00pm.

**Friday 11 May 2018**

### **Visit to Savill and Valley Gardens in Surrey. TW20 0UU.**

John Anderson will give us a tour of these spectacular gardens. Two hours plus at Savill, with its *Arisaemas*, *Trilliums*, *Erythroniums*, woodland walks and more. Lunch at the Savill Building. Then the Valley Garden, an easy 1 mile walk, for the afternoon. This 250-acre garden has a wonderful display of *Azaleas*, *Rhododendrons* and *Magnolias*, as well as a wide range of rare trees and shrubs. Pre-booking will ensure a discount on the normal £10.50 entry fee. If you have yet to give your names to Gill Sawyer, please do so asap.

**Directions:** From A30 turn left into Wick Lane, 3 miles north of Sunningdale, then follow signs to Savill Gardens.

**Time:** Meet at 10.00 am outside the garden entrance.

**Friday 29 June 2018**

### **Visit to Malverleys Gardens, East End, Nr Newbury RG20 0AA**

A tour of this 8-year-old flower garden, started in 2010 and designed by the head gardener, Mat Reese, and the owners. We will see the influence of Christopher Lloyd, William Robinson and Vita Sackville-West. Entry: £10, including tea and cake. Plants for sale.

**Directions:** Turn West off the A34 just north of Highclere. Malverleys lies at the NE corner of the hamlet of East End.

**Time:** Meet at 2.00 pm.

**Saturday 14 July 2018**

**TWO VISITS:**

**Mike and Ann Collins' Garden. 1 Brook Cottages, Lyford, nr. Wantage. OX12 0EQ.**

**Edulis Nursery, The Walled Garden, Tidmarsh Lane, nr. Pangbourne RG8 8HT**

**am:** 1, Brook Cottages: a real plantsman's garden with many rare and unusual plants, grown to perfection. Aged just 3 years, and measuring 25m x 25m, it looks well established and colourful. Entry: £5 including tea and coffee.

**Time:** Meet at 10.30am.

**Directions:** Take A4130 W from the A34 N of Newbury, through E & W Hanney to Lyford. Don't turn into Lyford, stay on the Charney Bassett Road, past some big barns, and the cottages are on the right just before the bridge.

**Lunch:** A good light lunch can be taken at The Bell at Aldworth on the way to Edulis.

**pm:** Edulis Nursery: owner Paul Barney, is known to many of us for the interesting plants he brings to our fairs and sales, and for his wide travels. Paul will show us around.

**Time:** Meet at the nursery at 2.30pm

**Directions:** From Tidmarsh on A340 S of Pangbourne, turn W onto Tidmarsh Lane. In 1 mile turn into Lime Tree Avenue at 'South Lodge', after the crossroads at Dark Lane/Bere Court Road.

**Sunday 2 September 2018**

**AUTUMN PLANT SALE at Meon Orchard, Kingsmead, Nr Wickham. PO17 5AU.**

A visit to Doug and Linda Smith's garden, in conjunction with their NGS Open Day. A 2-acre Garden planted with a huge array of exotic plants, including three National Collections. Specialist nursery stalls and members' plants, 20 acre meadow and ½ mile of River Meon river bank. Please bring plants for sale. Members and children free, general public £5. Home-made teas. Ample parking.

**Directions:** A32 north from Wickham for 1½ miles, turn left at Roebuck Inn, garden in ½ mile. Follow NGS yellow signs.

**Time:** 2.00pm - 6.00pm.

**Later events will be published in the Autumn Newsletter**

## **New Members**

The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Group welcomes the following new, or re-joining, members. We look forward to seeing you at some of our events.

**Rob Stuart, Susan Jones, Victoria Estcourt  
Christine Wood, Sharon Wort**



## The Hunt for *Rhododendron macabeanum*

The first formal survey of Nagaland and neighbouring Manipur was conducted in 1882 by George Watt, who discovered what is now known as *Rhododendron macabeanum*, growing in dense pure stands on and near the summit of Mount Japfu between 2440m and 2898m altitude. Watt made detailed field notes and took herbarium specimens. However, he wrongly named the plant *R. falconerii* subsp. *macabeanum* after his friend Mr Macabe, the District Commissioner for Manipur. Unfortunately for Watt, there was no seed present at the time of discovery, so all that could be sent back was a herbarium specimen. It was not until nearly 40 years later when working on Watt's dried specimens that Baily Balfour of Edinburgh Botanic Gardens realised it was in fact a new species. He published both Watt's and his own descriptions. Frank Kingdon-Ward, the great Edwardian plant collector and explorer, was then dispatched to Mount Japfu to collect and introduce this wonderful plant into cultivation. Seeds were distributed to the great gardens of the day, including Trengwainton near Penzance in Cornwall, where it first flowered in the UK in 1937. This won several RHS awards, including the award of merit and a first class certificate.

Unknown to Ward, *R. macabeanum* would prove to be one of the most iconic and easy to grow of the large-leaved rhododendrons, proving to be relatively hardy and drought-tolerant (bearing in mind that these magnificent plants grow in some of the wettest mountains on Earth). He was also unaware of the very limited distribution of this fine plant; according to all research to date, it has been discovered only on this one mountain, with a possible dwarf variety growing on the summit of Mount Samarati to the east.

Nagaland is one of India's smallest states and its mountains form a natural border with Burma to the east. It is culturally rich, with over 17 different hill tribes making up its population; more indigenous languages are spoken there than anywhere else in India. Its recently turbulent past has now been put to rest with the formation of a new unity government.



With all this knowledge and given that only a handful of Western botanists had ever seen *R. macabeanum* growing in the wild, John Anderson, my predecessor at Exbury, and

myself (head gardener at Trelissick at the time) decided we would join a small

group of like-minded enthusiasts and go to India's remote and mysterious north-east.

The Naga Hills are a maze of emerald-green peaks and valleys, clad



predominantly in subtropical evergreen forests under the influence of the monsoon. These forests still cover almost 20 percent of Nagaland. Several of its peaks rise to over 3,000m and can therefore sustain small areas of temperate forest on and around their summits. They are home to several species of rhododendron endemic to the region and not found in

the main Himalayan range, including *R. macabeanum* and the lesser known but equally spectacular *R. elliotii*, which has also only ever been found on Mount Japfu.

Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, clings to the hillsides surrounding the base of Mount Japfu. It was the scene of one of the decisive battles of the Burma campaign in WW2, when a handful of British officers, supported by local tribesmen held off the advancing Japanese forces and prevented the full-scale invasion of India. The Nagas are justifiably very proud of this time in their history, which still defines their cultural identity to this day. They were also until recently notorious for their head-hunting activities, another reason why the Naga Hills have remained closed to the outside world.

After flying to Delhi and on to Assam, our group spent several days driving through oppressive heat before entering the noticeably cooler Naga Hills. Our little Indian jeep fought its way valiantly through the potholes and other hazards of the unmade mountain roads for what remained of our journey. As India has only one time zone, the further east you go the earlier it gets dark, meaning we were driving in the dark shortly after our lunch! The first village we passed boasted several impressive churches (Nagaland is now over 97 percent Christian Baptist). We passed through countless villages, all with immaculate gardens. The Nagas are clearly keen gardeners and all the homes, however modest, displayed a very high standard of civic pride. We eventually arrived (after several road blocks and checkpoints) in Kohima, where we were met by our hostess, Miss Nino, who runs a first-class hostel at the foot of Mount Japfu.

Miss Nino had arranged for several local boys to report at 5.30am to act as our guides (their only qualifications seemed to be a rusty machete and a pair of flip-flops).



With an early start the mountain can be done in a single day, although there is a dilapidated bothy about half way up for those who wish to cut their journey in half. Judging by the number of leeches present when we stopped for a snack, this bothy would not be my first choice of accommodation and we soon resumed our trek. Not only did Miss Nino join us on our ascent, she insisted on bringing a three-course lunch for us all. Just before we left the comfort of our hostel she mentioned that in January a forest fire had burned for 10 days close to the summit; eventually the Indian government had sent a fire-fighting helicopter to douse the flames. We struck out through the cultivated lower slopes

of Mount Japfu, through potato and squash plantations, to the fringe of the evergreen temperate forest knowing that the entire world population of *E. macabeanum*, that we had crossed half the world to visit, might have been wiped out in a forest fire.

On the fringes of the forest we quickly encountered plants we recognised from our woodland gardens back in the UK: *Schefflera* spp., evergreen oak, and many aromatic laurels mixed in with the typical subtropical flora. By late morning we had exchanged the heat of the lower slopes, for the cool temperate forest that was home to our target rhododendrons. After we had eaten a fine picnic of local specialities miraculously produced by Miss Nino from her small rucksack (including china plates), the mist cleared to reveal a spectacular view on both sides of the mountain. To the east lay the Dzukou valley, with its folds of green forest stretching away; and to the west the urban sprawl and chaos of Kohima, that looked relatively calm in the distance. By now, the charred remains of the forest fire were all around us. To our horror large pure stands of *R. arboreum* had succumbed to the flames, with little sign of regeneration. However, when we rounded a corner of the ridge we could see in the distance the summit of Mount Japfu, still covered with trees, untouched by the fire, encouraging us to carry on.

Entering the remaining forest John and I had our first glimpse of a young *R. macabeanum* seedling growing in the leaf litter. The forest, although still evergreen, now consisted of a mixture of evergreen oak, whitebeams, *Sorbus* and birch. To begin with, *R. macabeanum* formed the understorey, growing amongst the roots and lower branches of the larger trees alongside *R. elliotii* and the epiphytic *R. polyandrum*. It's hard to put into words our relief and excitement



at seeing these plants, not only still alive but forming a healthy self-sustaining population. To my delight I discovered a mossy log that was acting as a nursery, with about 200 young plants growing in the cool moss and humus as happily as in any mist unit back home in the UK.

Within minutes we entered a forest of pure *R. macabeanum*, not only producing a healthy understorey but growing up to 30 feet high and forming a dense canopy with its thick leathery leaves blocking out the light. I have seen large-leaved rhododendrons growing in other Himalayan forests, but normally as the understorey; hence their need for large leaves in order to photosynthesise in the dark forests. To be standing in a forest of these magnificent plants, with their huge leaves blocking out the sun, and their trunks festooned in moss, is unlike anything I had ever witnessed before; it was an experience I will never forget.

As we made our way back down to our hostel we reflected on the importance of conserving these unique ecosystems, where plants like *R. macabeanum* play an important part. The fragility of these temperate forests, which are essentially relics of a much colder period, clinging on to a few mountain tops, is obvious. With the need for extra land for food production and the pressure from population increase and climate change, it is more important than ever to ensure that these fragments are looked after properly. Although the fire was less catastrophic than we had feared, it certainly highlighted the risk facing these plants. Both ex- and in-situ conservation and the role of gardens in ensuring that plants like these can be preserved for years to come are more vital than ever, as is accurate record-keeping. This will mean that plants of known provenance can be propagated and distributed to guarantee their survival.

**Tom Clarke, Head Gardener, Exbury Gardens**

## Profile of a Gardener: Joan Taylor

Joan Taylor is well known for her National Collection of *Geranium nodosum*. She also has a wide interest in many other plants, as visitors to her lovely garden in Hampshire will know. Her interest in gardening began as a child with a love of wild flowers. She can still remember the sheer astonishment she felt at her first sight of a *Fritillaria meleagris* growing in the water meadows on her family's farm.



Joan always kept pot plants on window sills at work but it was not until she and her late husband John moved into their new house that her interest in gardening started to develop. In those days the garden borders were confined to the edges, and plants had to be tough enough to

cope with a free-draining sandy soil, her boys' footballs and the deer that grazed in the garden at night.

While helping on the plant stalls at her children's school sales Joan used to notice some unusual plants; anything interesting was bought and planted. She found that hardy geraniums actually thrived on her sandy soil: thus began her love of these plants. She became a compulsive propagator. She discovered with Lesley Baker a shared interest in plants. Together with another friend, Jackie Irik, they decided to grow interesting plants.

It was during that time, in the mid 1990's, that Joan and her husband used to visit Mottisfont Rose Gardens. Joan became increasingly frustrated that the plants being sold did not include the wealth of unusual perennial plants growing in the gardens. David Stone, the head gardener, agreed that he would love to see plants from the garden being propagated for sale. This gave Joan, Lesley and Jackie the incentive they needed and they started selling their plants the following year. They often worked very long hours in order to supply their early morning deliveries to Mottisfont. In about 2011 they decided to diversify and open a nursery at Silverwood, Joan's home. Birchwood Plants was born. The nursery was open for three or four years on a part-time basis, and plants were also sold at plant fairs



and by mail order. Eventually, they decided to follow their own individual gardening passions and go their separate ways.

Joan's husband died in 2002 of motor neurone disease. She named her discovery of *Geranium nodosum* 'Silverwood' after her home, in memory of her husband. All proceeds from her sales of this plant were donated to the Motor Neurone Disease Association and over £2,500 was raised. This pretty white geranium has been included in displays at Chelsea and Hampton Court flower shows. It is also planted at Mottisfont and at Hidcote.

In 2004 Penelope Hellyer, daughter of the late horticulturist, editor and author, Arthur Hellyer, decided to relocate to Italy. As a result Joan acquired her collection of hardy geraniums, which included many unusual and rare treasures, including G. 'Nora Bremner', as well as a number of *Geranium nodosum*; this prompted Joan to research the plant. Having discovered 'Silverwood', she started to realise the value of the nodosums: they do very well in shade and in poor soil and come in several interesting shades. This spurred her on to grow as many varieties as possible, setting her on the path to acquiring the National Collection of *Geranium nodosum*, which she has held since 2012.



Joan is a keen member of Plant Heritage and the Hardy Plant Society and is a plant guardian of *Iris* 'Ochraurea' (Spuria) at Mottisfont (see left), and also *Geranium* 'Nora Bremner'. She also introduced *Geranium phaeum* 'Mottisfont Rose' and currently has several interesting geranium seedlings which she is trialling before introducing them.

The time spent at Mottisfont over several years intensified Joan's love and knowledge of old roses, and the number of roses in her own garden began to multiply. She now has a very large collection of historic roses and has acquired a detailed understanding of these plants. She has become passionate about the variety and value of many old roses: their history, beauty and wonderful fragrance. She feels strongly that many have been discarded in favour of new varieties when, in fact, old roses continue to flourish whilst some of the newer ones come and go with fashion.

In 2014 the Heritage Rose Collection Conference was held to mark David Stone's retirement as Head Gardener at Mottisfont. A number of overseas delegates visited Joan's garden to view her collection of roses. Joan feels that she has probably been most influenced by the late Graham Stuart Thomas, who knew his plants

and paid an intense attention to detail. These days she visits rose gardens in California, Perth, Adelaide and New Zealand. Her garden has evolved over the years and now includes many more beds and borders, full of interesting and unusual trees, shrubs, and perennials, including her beloved hardy geraniums and old roses; and in 2015 she hosted a visit for the Hardy Geranium Group's study day, which was a huge success.

Today, Joan's nursery is significantly reduced as she prefers to focus on growing rare plants, some of which are still available from her by mail order. Visitors to her beautiful garden are still very welcome by appointment during spring and summer.

*Tricia Newton*

## **Pond Life**

There is something very rewarding about a garden pond, from the pleasure of seeing the simple reflection of a leaf to the thrill of being visited by a kingfisher hoping for a meal. Of course, if it is a proper wildlife pond there will not be any fish in it, just tadpoles, efts (baby newts) and myriads of other wildlife all trying to eat each other.

When we built our third pond we had experienced all the pitfalls and problems



before, so we knew exactly what we wanted. We were lucky enough to inherit a mound formed by a spoil heap from an extension to the house, and we set about building our pond with a wildlife slope at the back and a retaining wall around the front, which we could use to sit on. In the daytime we spend a lot of time dangling our fingers in the water, while at night we peer

into the depths with a torch.

The pond is 2ft deep in the middle and has a shelf about 9 inches wide around two-thirds of its perimeter for the marginal plants. In our experience, butyl is the most long-lasting material; you can buy it off a roll at a water garden centre or probably nowadays by mail order. When planning a garden pond, don't be mean. However big you build it, you will wish it was bigger, I promise. The liner will need an underlay to protect it from stones and anything sharp underneath. We built a double retaining wall and tucked the liner between the two courses,

finishing with coping stones across the top. Our pond is actually quite big; we emptied all our water butts into it but it still needed another day to fill (see picture).



Plants are the most important feature of any pond and arguably the most fun. As I noted earlier, we have learned from our mistakes and know which plants to avoid and which are an absolute must. When we

first bought pond plants in the late 1980s there wasn't much information about some very invasive species which have run amok in our streams and rivers (see list below). Fortunately, there is more control now on what we should and shouldn't buy.

**Oxygenators** are vital: without them any body of water will be green and full of algae. They come in many forms, including some great native ones such as hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*). They do not need to be planted; they are usually available in small bunches which can be tossed into the water. The more they grow the more minerals they take up from the water, which in turn helps keep the water clear and healthy for the wildlife. All pond plants grow like mad, so if you know anyone with a successful pond, they are very likely to be throwing out their surplus plants and will be only too willing to pass them on. That way, you get free plants and also some extras such as water snail eggs or newt eggs, which are often laid on foliage. Beware: you may also get unwelcome guests such as great diving beetles or duckweed. Everything has its place in the order of things; we were very excited to see pair of great diving beetles mating in our day-old pond only to discover that they are the top predator and chomp their way through tadpoles and efts. But being beetles they will fly in to colonise new ponds, together with water boatmen, pond skaters and other types of pond life.

**Marginals** are the stars of the pond and come in an array of colours from the white of *Caltha leptosepala* through yellow to the crimson of *Lobelia cardinalis*. Aquatic irises also come in various colours and there is a beautiful variegated *Iris laevigata* 'Variegata', which has blue flowers and is very well behaved. Most marginals need about 4 to 6 inches of water and can be planted in baskets around the shelf of the pond. As they grow, the roots knit together and they hold themselves up. When they have outgrown their space, the baskets can be lifted and the plants divided like any herbaceous plant. There are marginal plants for all seasons: the beautiful

marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* starts about March and the pickerel weed *Pontaderia cordata* flowers well into September with its stunning blue spears. We are great birdwatchers and planned the pond to accommodate birds and other wildlife. When we designed the slope, we cemented flat stones onto the liner to lead down into the water; one of the greatest pleasures we get from our pond is watching the starlings or sparrows having a communal bath. Water goes everywhere, and other smaller birds often join in around the edges and enjoy a shower. At a point in the retaining wall we have left out a stone, so that if the pond gets very full it overflows into a bog garden where we have plants that don't mind standing in wet soil. Plants such as purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, *Primula denticulata*, *Primula florindae*, *Ligularia* varieties and hostas all enjoy a good soaking from time to time. We dug a hole, lined it with a piece of old liner, punctured it in a few places and then back-filled it with soil.

We are being told that we must help our bees and butterflies to survive, and a pond is certainly a magnet for insects of all sizes. Our native water mint *Mentha aquatica* is a favourite with many kinds of bumblebees and butterflies and has the prettiest fluffy blue flowers. All the beneficial pollinators drop in for the odd drink, including hornets (making me duck). Dragonflies arrived the first summer and laid their eggs around the edge of the pond, as did damselflies. Dragonfly nymphs can live in a pond for up to three years before metamorphosing, and they are voracious predators. And, of course, all those tadpoles make lovely fat frogs which help keep the slugs down, allowing us to grow more hostas. A favourite memory of ours was early one February when we had a chorus of at least 50 male frogs, all with their heads poking out of the water, croaking in the pond



together, waiting for a female. Surely a garden pond, however big or small, is of huge benefit to any garden.

**Janet Dedman**

## **Pond Plants to avoid: invasive**

Australian swamp stonecrop *Crassula helmsii*  
Curly water weed *Lagarosiphon major*  
Floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle rannunculoides*  
Parrot's feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum*  
Water fern *Azolla filiculoides*  
Water primrose *Ludwigia peploides*  
Canadian pondweed *Elodea canadensis*

## **Pond Plants to grow** (as recommended by the Wildlife Trust)

### **Shallows - ledges**

Yellow flag iris and other irises  
Water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*  
Water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*  
Branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*  
Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*

### **Deeper water**

Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*  
Water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*  
Common water starwort *Callitriche stagnalis*  
Spiked water milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*  
Curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus*  
Willow moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*

### **Floaters**

Fringed water lily *Nymphoides peltata* syn. *Villarsia nymphaeoides* (not a water lily)  
Water soldier *Stratiotes aloides*  
Curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus*

As mentioned in the article, pond plants grow fast and all these plants will need lifting and dividing on a regular basis.

## **Wildlife Gardening: using containers**

If you have a patio, a very small garden, or even just a sunny balcony or window sill, these spaces can all be used to give wildlife a helping hand by planting pots full of nectar-bearing flowers. Butterfly Conservation has been promoting "Pots for Pollinators" on their website, which gives lots of good suggestions. Gardens have become an increasingly valuable space for pollinating insects, often supporting a wider range of species than the open countryside, especially if pesticides are not used. Tubs, pots, hanging baskets and window boxes can all be pressed into service. It's best to think in terms of all pollinators, as you are just as likely to get bees and hoverflies coming to your pots as butterflies and moths. You will be



dependent on the surrounding habitat (either the rest of your garden or the local countryside) for attracting butterflies: if they are there, they will find your pots. The most likely butterflies are whites, peacock, red admiral or small tortoiseshell, all pretty mobile species. The most important thing is to ensure that you place whatever container you plant in a sunny spot.

You can use almost any type of plant you like; annuals and tender perennials are fine, but avoid bedding plants as most of them have no nectar or pollen and are quite sterile and of no use to insects. Double or multi-petalled flowers are also of less use as their limited amount of nectar is often hard to reach.

As with gardening in the open ground, a long season of interest is the most beneficial, and seasonal pots work well. Early emerging insects need nectar and pollen urgently, and late in the year many bumblebees are feeding up for winter hibernation. In spring, bulbs such as crocuses have accessible pollen, and primroses are always a hit with brimstone and orange tip butterflies as well as bumblebees. Wallflowers are nectar-rich and spring flowers such as *Ajuga*, *Euphorbia* spp. and hellebores will all attract insects. A container planted with herbs which are allowed to flower, such as chives, hyssop, lavender, oregano or thyme, acts as a magnet. If you can vary flowering times you get a constant succession of insects inspecting your offerings.

In summer long-tongued bumblebees such as the Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*) or the Common Carder Bee (*Bombus pascuorum*) enjoy tubular flowers, whereas short-tongued types (most of the others you are likely to attract) like open single flowers where the pollen and nectar are easily accessed. Single open flowers are also best for butterflies and moths; moths especially are attracted to night-scented flowers such as evening primrose. The greater the range of flowers you provide, the more pollinators you will benefit.

Some good choices for a summer pot include: Catmint (*Nepeta racemosa*), adored by bees and butterflies; cranesbill geraniums (e.g. G. 'Rozanne') or Cosmos (*C. bipinnatus*) with their open accessible forms and long flowering season; Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantina*), which is nectar-rich and attractive to carder bees; or Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Snow Lady'), a mass of long-lasting blooms. Giant Hyssop (*Agastache*) and Gayfeather (*Liatris*), both with long flower spikes packed with flowers, are also good.

For a wilder display it would be worth trying a pot of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), or some combination of Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*), Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Wild Candytuft (*Iberis amara*), Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*), Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium caerulea*), Small scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*) or Mallow (*Malva moschata*). Any flower with a compound head (made up of many small flowers appearing as a single bloom) is

very valuable: alliums, daisies, coneflowers, teasel, *Echinops*, *Agapanthus*, *Armeria maritima* (sea pink) or *Scabious* are all examples of this group.



Many insects are struggling. They are valuable as pollinators and also as part of the food chain, an essential source of food for birds and other predators. They are also decorative (well, butterflies are, and the bumblebee's buzz is the sound of summer); anything we gardeners can do to attract and nurture them will help to offset their general decline in the wider countryside, caused in part by

habitat degradation, pesticides, loss of wildflowers, and modern farming practices.

**Juliet Bloss, Editor**

## **Collection Holders: the newsletter needs you!**

**M**any of you reading this piece have written or write regularly for the newsletter. People have been very generous with their time and patient with my requests for articles. I'd like to thank all you contributors for your efforts and for all the times you have got me out of a hole by responding to requests at short notice. The newsletter would not exist without you.

We have always been very well supported by Hilliers and Exbury, among others, but I have felt for some time that it would be good to hear a bit more from collection holders; I know how busy you are, but it doesn't have to be a massive piece. It would be interesting, for instance, to hear about a particular plant, or group of plants in your collection: a special favourite, or a good garden do-er that would benefit from being better known, perhaps with some cultural advice; or to learn how you got interested in your collection, how you source your plants, any problems you encounter, and so on.

And if you are reading this and don't have a collection (lots of people who write for us don't) it would be good to hear about your garden or your favourite plants. Perhaps your interest is in pond plants, or wildlife plants, or woodland plants: whatever your bent is, we would like to hear about it. The deadline for the autumn newsletter is September 14, which gives everyone the whole season to think about it. So I do hope you *will* think about it and get in touch with me by phone or email: Juliet Bloss 023 8084 8085; email: [sevenmeads@aol.com](mailto:sevenmeads@aol.com).

**Juliet Bloss, Editor**

## Salvia National Collection, France

The National Collection of *Salvia* in France is in the garden of Louis in the village of Arzon in southern Brittany where there is very little frost, but also not much rainfall. The collection is owned by Sébastien Coupe and Cathy Bernabe whose nursery, 'Fleurs and Senteurs', is up on the north coast of Brittany.

Laurent and Lynette Labeyrie own the garden and do all the day to day running of both it and the collection. Sébastien and Cathy contributed most of the plants in the beginning, and continue to expand it in conjunction with Laurent and Lynette, who have been working hard to obtain plants by visiting many nurseries and collections.



In 2011 they began to plant salvias in the garden, but weren't awarded full National Collection status until 2017. In 2012 greenhouses were built to house the more tender plants. One is a permanently glazed conventional greenhouse and two are lean-to structures against the walls, which have removable glazing for the summer months (i.e. most of the year).

The garden has a minimum temperature of about  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  at its worst, and an average rainfall of about 22ins; the soil is very free draining and, of course, they have much more sun than we do. The garden has a limited supply of well water, but they are heavily restricted on the use of water from the mains, unlike in England, where National Collections are exempt from any watering restrictions. The garden is totally enclosed by 6ft stonewalls and has a series of island beds, planted predominately with salvias.

As we were there in August the garden was filled with colour; the collection was well labelled throughout, and would be worth a visit by anyone who has an interest in the genus. Although they have sun and mild winters some of the plants don't reach the size of many of ours which are planted outside. The sun loving Mediterranean and Californian types are very happy and growing much better there, but some of the Asian salvias are struggling to survive. I am sure this will improve as Laurent and Lynette get used to the individual needs of these plants.

We took them many salvias to add to their collection, and we understand that they are busy propagating plants to bring to us when they visit in the spring. We hope in time that we will have each other's back up collection. One of the benefits of this arrangement is that we can compare how the same plants grow in very different conditions, and we can all learn a lot from this exchange.



We were treated like royalty by Laurent and Lynette in their lovely beachside home overlooking the oyster beds, eating fresh seafood every day. I do hope that they won't be disappointed when they visit us!

Adults from left to right: Sébastian, Kathe, John, Lynette and Lauren.  
The children are the grand children of Sebastian.

**Lynsey Pink, National Collection Holder of *Salvia***

## **Wanted: *Salvia* collection holders**

Our National Collection is of *Salvia* spp., but we also grow many salvias that are not species. Prompted partly by the collection review that highlighted the fact that our title didn't really match the plants on our list it seemed we needed to re-scope (re-name) our collection. We had been trying to keep every salvia we have ever grown and that is really not an option in a private garden. From now on we are going to concentrate on our National Collection of species, and only grow the hybrids and cultivars that are good garden plants. We hope that this will make our collection a little easier to manage.

We have also decided that we need to sort out the succession issue. We have been aware of this for some time, but have so far ignored it. It has been difficult for us to face what will happen to our collection when we are no longer able to look after it.

We were recently in France visiting the new National Collection of *Salvia* in Brittany, and plan to share all that we can with them (see previous article). We have also been to Germany this year to visit Frank Fischer. He has a nursery and garden and is an excellent salvia grower. Frank is reluctant to have a national

collection of his own, but he is very involved with the collection at the Botanic Garden in Hamburg. We managed to bring quite a few new *Salvia* spp. home with us to add to our collection, and hope that he can visit us soon and do the same. We are mindful of the health issues of moving plants around the continent. This is not an ideal option in the long term, and of course the cost of travelling abroad is not trivial.

We are hoping to find salvia lovers in the UK who would like to take on part of our *Salvia* collection. A national collection of *Salvia* spp. is a very large collection, and to divide it up into smaller sections would be a very acceptable way of doing it. It could be divided up geographically into new world and old world, or by continent, or by country, to make it more manageable for someone else to take on.

We are not yet looking at giving up our collection, but would like to run it alongside others. This would mean we had back up plants in the UK; in addition, new enthusiastic growers would spur us on to do more of the work that is desperately needed in getting the naming in this genus sorted out. It would also mean that when the time came for us to give up there would already be other established collections. Our lovely salvias would not be lost and by then we could have passed on all the knowledge we have gathered over the years.

***Lynsey Pink, National Collection Holder of Salvia***

## **News from the world of Cannas**

### **Canna Trial**

In what is planned as an annual feature, last year we allocated part of our plant nursery at Bisley to trial all the 150 or so varieties and species of cannas of our collection in an open ground planting. Several samples of each variety were grown in a group, alongside groups of similar varieties for comparison. The layout was in the form of an avenue with plants on either side. In 2018 we plan to extend this trial over a larger area. Visitors are welcome by arrangement, and open days will be held over the late



autumn Bank Holiday. For further details see: [www.canna-trial-international.com](http://www.canna-trial-international.com)

## Donation to Jurong Lake Gardens, Singapore

In a nation state already famed for its parks and gardens, this massive 90-hectare new national park is being created in the Jurong district (see photo). The



The first phase will be opened in 2018 and the remainder will be completed by 2020. We were approached by the designers of this park who wished to purchase some cannas. One thing led to another, and we felt that it would be to everyone's advantage if we donated samples of all the varieties and species of our canna collection to this new development. There would then be a reserve of canna varieties grown in a better climate than the UK, and a link with Singapore could be beneficial both

ways. Plant Heritage head office were enthusiastic about this idea, which duly went ahead.

***Keith and Christine Hayward***  
***holders of the National Collection of Canna***

## Sparsholt College: RHS Chelsea 2018

The Force for Good Garden has three sections. It highlights the experiences of those supported by the Help for Heroes charity, which uses horticultural therapy as part of their recovery and provides ongoing support. It shows how growing vegetables, crops and other plants combined with working in a natural setting such as a garden can promote recovery.

Sparsholt College's students and staff met with those supported by the Help for Heroes Recovery Centre at Tedworth House, and were inspired to create a garden with them to inform the visitor of their journey from arrival, through recovery, to ongoing support. Some of the students also had their own mental health problems to overcome, and had been similarly helped by the therapeutic benefits of horticulture.

In the first section ("Surviving"), we position and group plants to show the disorientation, conflicting feelings and mental state before entering the recovery programme. Featured plants include: *Aloe ferox*; *Agave americana* cvs; *Berberis candidula* 'Telstar'; *Olearia macrodonta*; *Osmanthus* spp; *Corokia cotoneaster*;



*Corokia x virgate* 'Sunsplash'; *Coprosma x kirkii* 'Variegata'; and *Pseudopanax ferox*.



In the second section ("Stability"), we portray some of the activities undertaken at the four Help for Heroes Recovery Centres, focusing on crop production and horticultural skills. Featured plants include: a range of Lettuce, *Lactuca sativa* cultivars, including both frisee and scarole types; a range of oriental greens, including Chinese cabbage

cultivars, *Brassica rapa* var. *pekinensis*; red-veined sorrel, *Rumex acetosa*; mountain spinach, *Atriplex* 'Scarlet Emperor'; mustard, *Sinapsis alba*; and *Origanum vulgare*. The shed roof has a "patriotic" turf featuring red, white and blue wildflowers.

In the third and final section ("Support"), we show a UK garden planting area including a still pool with seating, promoting relaxation, recovery and ongoing support. Featured plants include: *Primula vialli*; *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'; *Pulmonaria* 'Opal'; *Galium odoratum*; hosta cultivars, e.g. 'Fragrant Bouquet'; *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding' and others; *Betula pendula*; *Rosa* and *Lonicera* spp.; and *Blechnum chinense* syn. *B. tabulare*.



Together with offering a route for involvement for the wider community as well as those supported by Help for Heroes, the Force for Good Garden encourages its supporters to help not only by donating but by joining in. We aim to demonstrate how gardening can benefit physical and mental health for all.

**Chris Bird, Sparsholt College**

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