



# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 135 / March 2021 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

**W**alking through my garden this morning I noticed that a lot of shrubs and trees were starting to come back into life. The magnolias were in heavy bud but so far none were showing any colour, although that will have changed by the time you read this. Last year the first magnolias bloomed in January; clearly it has been a colder winter because that did not happen this year.

The stirrings of spring are always exciting to me as a stark indication that another year has begun. Whilst we will have our plants to enjoy it doesn't look as though we will be undertaking many other 'normal' things until the pandemic is behind us.

## Shows and other events

Taking into account all the information that we have about the pandemic and the vaccination programme, the Management Committee have taken the decision to cancel all national face-to-face events for the whole of 2021. Considering that our three genera predominately flower in the first half of the year this was an easy decision to make. Branches may be able to hold small events later in the year following Government guidelines at that time.

## Annual General Meeting

One of the events that can therefore not be held face-to-face is our AGM. We have been using Zoom for our recent Committee Meetings and have taken out a professional licence. We held our last AGM using Skype. Using Zoom instead should enable the AGM to run more efficiently.

The 2021 AGM will therefore be held at 4pm on Saturday 8th May via Zoom. You will be contacted by Group email giving details of how to apply for an invitation.

## Events Co-ordinator

I am very pleased to say that we have filled the vacancy for an Events co-ordinator. We have co-opted Wendelin Morrison and will confirm her in post at the AGM. She is already developing a range of virtual events that will be held on a regular basis throughout the year. You may indeed have received details of the first before you read this.



*Rhododendron 'Blue Bell' at Sofiero Castle, Sweden (Fig. 3 – see page 8).*  
Photo: Kristian Theqvist

*The group urgently needs a volunteer to be Membership Secretary. For details, see p.2*

She is looking forward to the lockdown ending and being able to organise tours and other face-to-face events. The virtual events will probably continue regardless since, apart from anything else, they enable our more distant members to take part.

## Centenary Cup Photographic Competition

The Virtual Competition we organised last year was very successful and we will be running a similar competition this year. There will be some changes based on our experience and we hope to get more entries from the Southern Hemisphere this year. Full details are given later in this bulletin.

## Website

The new website has been in existence for some months now and I hope that you agree that it is an improvement on the previous one.

We are currently working on improving the content of the Plant Directories. This involves the rewriting of the descriptions of the plants to make them more accurate and consistent. We also

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need more and better images of our plants and you will have received invitations to submit these. In addition, we are defining attributes that will enable you to search for plants with particular characteristics. The first of these, indicating whether a plant has an AGM, is operational and more will follow through the year.

### **Volunteers**

We need a new Membership Secretary. Rupert Eley has filled that role efficiently and without fuss for the last 15 years but he has indicated that he needs to step down at the AGM in 2021 and we appreciate his reasons. We therefore urgently need someone with reasonable administration and computer skills to take on this role.

This is an extremely important role and more detail can be found in this bulletin. I beg you to consider whether you can help your group by taking it on.

*Graham Mills*

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### **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY NEEDED**

**T**he Membership Secretary is the initial point of contact for most new members. It is the important role of holding securely, managing and keeping up-to-date a detailed list of current members.

The list is a vital document, used to provide mailing details for publication mailings and email notifications.

New members join throughout the year but the Membership Secretary's busiest time is from October to January when subscription renewals are due and require organising, administrating and progressing enthusiastically.

The role can be a rewarding one for those who enjoy working with people first-hand and derive satisfaction from well-run administrative processes. Management Committee membership comes with the position and as such enables the holder to influence the Group's development in ways other than those surrounding membership.

Skills required involve familiarity with Microsoft Word and Excel and the work can all be conducted from home.

A full list of duties or further information is available on request from the Chairman.

### **NOTICE OF 2021 AGM**

**T**he 2021 AGM will be held at 4pm on Saturday 8th May via Zoom. You will be contacted by Group email giving details of how to apply for an invitation, should you wish to attend. Last year we made plans to hold this AGM at Ness Botanic Garden but due to the pandemic and to ensure the safety of all members, the Group will not be holding any in person events in 2021.

*Polly Cooke, Group Secretary*

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## **THE CENTENARY CUP PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2021**

**A**s we are not able to meet up to safely attend shows and other events we will, once again, be running a Photographic Competition this year. The competition winner will be awarded The Centenary Cup. We have tweaked the rules slightly since last year and they will be sent out as part of a Group-wide email, with full details of how to enter. The most important difference is for our International members, particularly those of you in the Southern Hemisphere. Photographs taken between 1st July 2020 and 30th June 2021 will be eligible for entry. So, while you wait for the details to arrive, do start looking through the photos you have taken since July last year.

### **PHOTOS FOR UPDATED WEBSITE**

**A**s you know, a team of us has been involved with upgrading the Group website. You should all have received an email from Pam Hayward asking for 'missing photos' for the plant descriptions already in the Plant Directory section on the new website. Do look at the website and in particular at the Plant Directory. We are proud of the achievements we have made in such a short time but this is no time to rest on our laurels. This is a work in progress and there are literally thousands of plants not yet included in the three main directories.

For example, at the time of writing there are over 720 entries for rhododendrons. There are many more that we can show off to the world but are not yet included. You can be a contributor by sending in photos of plants that are not yet listed. The team will sort out the plant description and use suitable photographs. We simply need the full name of the plant and where the photo was taken and if possible, the date it was taken, as well as your name. These details will be published and you will be credited for your photos. Let's all contribute towards making one of the best Plant Directories, for our three genera. It doesn't matter when the photo was taken.

If you have good quality high resolution photos of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias that are not yet included please send them to: [directory@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:directory@rhodogroup-rhs.org)

*Barry Cooke, Vice Chairman*

### **EVENTS COORDINATOR'S NOTE**

**I** am very pleased to be joining the RCM Group Committee as the new Events Coordinator, and thought it would be nice to introduce myself as the Group moves into a new world of offering online events. The current circumstances of lockdown have brought me, as it has many others, to a position of embracing the media of Zoom, Instagram and other online sharing platforms as never before. Until we are once again able to travel to gardens and landscapes physically, I am looking forward to creating a programme of online talks, workshops and virtual visits. My intention is to cover the three genera with the quality of content which the RCM Group members are accustomed to, in an innovative way which will hopefully spark inspiration and interest.





Dr Wendelin Morrison at Minterne. Photo: Mark Bobin

My love of the cultures, plants and animal life of the Himalayas, and Asia more widely, flows through my life as a gardener, artist and research scholar, and I hope that my interests as well as my academic experience of lecturing, pedagogy, and the design of online learning will bring vibrancy to the events programme. Working two days a week at Minterne Gardens in Dorset for approaching two years now has given me a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the three genera with the knowledgeable and inspiring guidance of Head Gardener, Mark Bobin. I am also currently working on a portfolio of botanical paintings of some of the historical collection of rhododendrons at Minterne for future exhibition and publication.

I have a particular interest in the medicinal plants of the Himalayas, which, perhaps unexpectedly to some, includes rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias! My scholarly research encompasses the iconography and creation of ancient and historic Tibetan sacred art, which includes not only paintings of deities and their ritual objects and mandalas but also the plants and animals of the region. One of my current research interests is in medicinal, botanical thangka (scroll) paintings which illustrate the vast array of Himalayan plants and their healing properties and applications within the Tibetan medicinal system. I am also working on a two-year project funded by the University of Cambridge Archaeology and Anthropology Museum in which, for the first time, I am combining my scholarly work with my expertise as a traditional thangka artist.

I hope that my passion for the plants, and the skills I have to offer will help me, along with the generous gardeners who contribute, to offer an exciting and inspirational programme to lighten these days of social distancing and take us forward to enjoy future plant explorations. I look forward to working with the Group.

*Wendelin Morrison*  
events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Copy date for the August 2021 Bulletin is 30th June. If there have been Branch activities by then I will welcome reports and photos. Members' notes are also welcome as are book reviews. Let us all know about exciting flowerings in your gardens and send in photos!

*Peter Furneaux*

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## BRANCH NEWS

### Irish Branch Notes

#### Annes Grove, Co Cork

In January 2016, the Annes Grove Estate in north County Cork became part of a portfolio of historic houses and gardens in the care of the National Historic Properties (NHP) branch of the Office of Public Works (OPW). The present garden at Annes Grove was created by Richard Grove Annesley between 1903 to the time of his death in 1966 at the age of eighty-seven.

Grove Annesley was connected by marriage to Henry Duncan McLaren, Lord Aberconway of Bodnant fame, who often visited and swapped plants. He also corresponded with Lionel de Rothschild, building a collection of many of the Exbury rhododendron hybrids. His gardening contacts in Ireland included Sir Frederick Moore at Glasnevin, the Marquess of Headfort at Kells, Co. Meath, the Smith-Barrys at Fota Arboretum and Annan Bryce on Garinish Island (Ilnacullin) in Bantry Bay, Co. Cork. Through this network he created one of the most celebrated gardens in Ireland in a magical valley and riverside setting.



Lord Aberconway & Richard Grove Annesley at Annes Grove. Photo courtesy of Patrick Grove Annesley. Photographer unknown.

*Continued overleaf*

He also raised the collections of many of the great plant hunters, most notably Captain Frank Kingdon Ward, and was responsible for gathering a syndicate of wealthy British and Irish gardeners to fund Kingdon Ward's 1956 expedition to Mount Victoria in the Chin Hills of Myanmar.

By the 1980s Annes Grove was ranked among the best gardens in Britain and Ireland. Following a period of sharp decline however, the house and gardens are now undergoing a dramatic restoration and over the last several years the plant collection, particularly magnolias and rhododendrons, has been enormously expanded. The gardens will be open to visitors for limited periods through 2021 and branch members should watch the gardening press.

### **Glasnevin, Dublin**

Despite the fact that the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin lies on a thin bed of alkaline soil, with a pH of 7.9, one of the joys of visiting the gardens in early spring is to see the enormous collection of vireya rhododendrons in bloom in the Asian Section of Richard Turner's masterpiece, the curvilinear range of glasshouses. Members are reminded to check Glasnevin's website in advance as the Great Glasshouses have been closed to visitors at times as a result of Covid 19.

### **Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow**

Meanwhile, at the National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh, Glasnevin's rural country estate, the collection of rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, enkianthus and kalmia has been enormously expanded in advance of extending the collections into the 18th century Deer Park and creating new garden areas in fields to the rear of the walled garden. The magnolia collection focuses on species but also the best selections and cultivars of 'big house' tree-like species that have a proven track record on the site. It also contains several cultivars of *Magnolia sargentiana* var. *robusta* hybrids named from the collection at Mount Congreve, Co. Waterford. Two Kilmacurragh rhododendrons registered with the Royal Horticultural Society last year, *R. 'Thomas Acton'* and *R. 'Janet Acton'* will be commercially available through Millais Nurseries in the next two to three years.



Magnolias at Mount Congreve gardens, Co. Waterford, one of the Great Gardens of the World. Photo: Seamus O'Brien

### **Dromana, Tourin and Mount Congreve, Co. Waterford**

Branch members are also reminded that the world-famous magnolia avenues at Mount Congreve reach their best approaching

Saint Patrick's Day (March 17th). Seen from a distance in bloom, the many hundreds of trees are reminiscent of a scene from the Himalaya and the Camellia collection (of over 700 different cultivars) should also provide much interest by then.

At Cappoquin, the woodland gardens at Cappoquin House, Dromana and Tourin will be open, subject to travel restrictions and again members are advised to check opening times in advance of visiting. All three gardens have good collections of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias (and many other choice woodlanders). A limited number of plants of *Rhododendron* 'Dromana 800' (bred by Michael White, Curator of Mount Congreve) will be for sale at Dromana this year.

### **Seaforde, Co. Down**

Members are reminded that many of our great woodland gardens are open in some capacity between various periods of lockdown during this pandemic period. County Down is richly endowed with good gardens with rich botanical collections. Seaforde is one of the county's best kept secrets, an old estate garden restored by the late Paddy Forde of plant hunting fame, and his wife, Lady Anthea, who continues to watch over the management of the gardens. Many of Paddy Forde's original rhododendron collections have reached maturity and *Rhododendron excellens* flowers particularly well there, as does the tender *Magnolia insignis* and *Schima khasiana*, from his Asian collection. (There is also a National Collection of Eucryphias in the vast walled garden. Ed) Just down the road is the Castlewellan Demesne, originally planted by Earl Annesley and well stocked with fine trees and many old rhododendron hybrids. Other good County Down gardens with significant rhododendron and magnolia collections include the National Trust gardens at Mount Stewart and Rowallane, and the privately owned Greyabbey House and Ringdufferin, both on the shores of Strangford Lough, on the scenic Ards Peninsula.

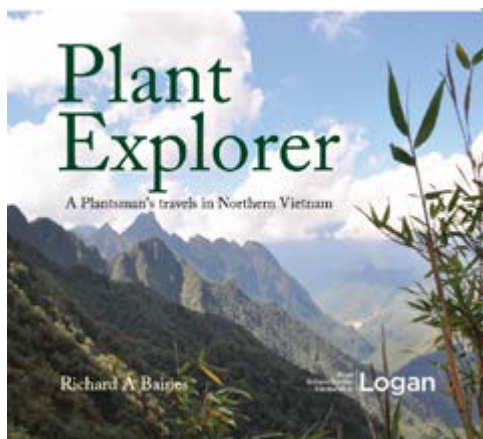
Seamus O'Brien

### **South West Branch news in a time of COVID**

As already indicated to members, the South West Branch decided a while ago that we could not host our own Branch competitions at the early show at Rosemoor this year and now it has been confirmed by the RHS that both the March and April national competitions have been cancelled so that neither Rosemoor events will take place. We are now considering opportunities for a small competitive gathering later in the spring, when it might be safe to do so. Our garden visits also may need to be small scale, very local initially and on a personally arranged basis which we as a Branch could facilitate. Our Autumn Meeting and AGM is still scheduled to happen on Saturday October 30th but may take a different form. We are keeping things under review in a fast changing situation. Perhaps this will prove to be a chance to innovate and try and do some things differently. A problem can also be viewed as an opportunity for change.

John Marston  
South West Branch Chairman





## Plant Explorer : A Plantsman's travels in Northern Vietnam

Author: Richard A Baines

ISBN: 978-0-9927744-3-1

Softcover: 154pp

Format: Landscape (215mm x 240mm)

Publisher: Hallerick's House for Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Publication date: December 2020. Available from: [www.rbgeshop.org.uk](http://www.rbgeshop.org.uk)

From the onset I knew that I was going to enjoy the contents of this recent title. I was encouraged by the various cover images, whilst inside, the clarity and choice of font, the heavyweight semi-gloss paper, the generous spread of high quality colour photographs throughout the text (many of them full-page), a relatively remote and unexplored botanical region in North-West Vietnam awaiting discovery: all do much to whet this reader's appetite and tempt inspection of the contents. It is worth adding that, much in the style of modern books, it has a soft cover which requires respect whilst there is no option for a hard cover edition.

I guess my appetite for a more in-depth botanical account of this region had been previously whetted by the author's earlier contribution in one of our own Year Books. The major contents of the book describe – in an easy to assimilate style – three separate and collaborative expeditions in 2014, 2016 and 2019 (the major part during October/November, in each case to coincide with seed collection) to the regions of Vietnam. These chapters amount to some 114 pages of the full text and are presented mainly in the novel form of a 'page-a-day' diary alongside a generous number of appropriate and very excellent photographs.

I found the two short introductory chapters did much to enlighten me as to the serious aims, conservation, preparation, research, funding, planned itineraries and team members' short that are obviously prerequisites to ventures of this nature.

The expedition diaries include a daily account of events; amusingly in some cases, even starting with breakfast menu details and then on to the absolutely mouth-watering list of plants and seed collections that were encountered – with many of them being new and/or rare in cultivation. As this review is destined for RCMG members I have highlighted just one example or similar from

each of our three genera that took my fancy from amongst the many treasures encountered. For my rhododendron choice I direct you to the full-page image on p.101 depicting outstanding foliage – representing a possible *Rhododendron species nova*, perhaps subsection *Argyrophylla/Taliensia*. I have taken the liberty, with no apologies, for substituting *Polyspora longicarpa* on p.63 as an interesting and relatively new alternative for my camellia entry; dark green glossy leaves act as a foil for the large camellia-like white single flowers with their multitude of central yellow stamens ("poached egg-like flowers"). Finally for my magnolia choice you must read to the near end of the book in order to find details of the critically endangered *Magnolia grandis* – restricted to a comparatively small number of mature trees remaining in the wild.

I am aware that despite the most rigorous of proof reading checks that errors can occur for whatever reason. Yes – I did note one or two minor typos but wearing my botanical hat would add for e.g. – *Huodendron tibeticum* it should read as (Family): *Styracaceae* – not *Syracaceae*. But this is a bit nit-picky for what is, in the main, error free text. On the other hand a previously unknown and evocative noun now added to my own vocabulary repertoire is – 'drumlin' – sounds very Scotland – but you will have to look that up for yourselves!

Informative, exciting, new and tantalising content – this recent title is certainly worthy of purchase and comes highly recommended. Such is my thirst for botanical knowledge of this relatively unknown area that my first reading was completed in

*Continued overleaf*

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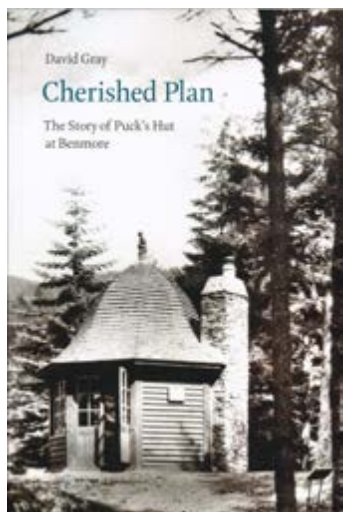
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one uninterrupted session. I for one await Richard's account of his Expedition 4 . . . and when? There is so much more to glean from your own copy or a trip to Logan Botanic Garden is now called for – which will conveniently avoid the leeches, incessant wet and humid weathers, mud, somewhat dubious hostelries, meals comprised of noodles, more noodles and even more noodles, porcupine, rice vodka et al; but the plants are fantastic!

John Sanders



### Cherished Plan: The Story of Puck's Hut

Author: David Gray

ISBN: 978-1-910877-35-7

Softcover: 56pp

Format: Landscape (160mm x 240mm)

Publisher: Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Publication date: September 2020

Price £8 + p/p

Available from: [www.rbgeshop.org.uk](http://www.rbgeshop.org.uk)

As rhododendron lovers, we all have reason to be grateful for the visionary work of Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour, 9th Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, from 1888 to 1922. Not only did he recognise the importance of the new introductions of the genus to the United Kingdom and the need to provide the correct environment for them to survive and thrive here but he had the wit and energy to see that need over the organisational hurdles of the day. Without his dedication it is doubtful RBGE would have achieved the status it has today with regard to *Rhododendron*.

I was lucky enough to receive this delightful little publication as an exchange gift from a fellow member – it would have escaped my attention otherwise, I am sure. The title alone is enigmatic enough to get the pages turning but the alluring image on the cover – an Arts and Crafts gem set among beautifully proportioned conifers – really caught my imagination.

The 'cherished plan' was indeed Balfour's ambition to create a satellite garden, away from the harsher environment of Edinburgh, where forest trees would nurture the burgeoning number of new species and in turn take on a critical importance of their own. Balfour was a prime mover in recognising the part trees have to play in maintaining climatic stability.

Following his untimely death so soon after his retirement, such was the affection and respect felt for the man, his peers sought first to remember Balfour with a plaque at RBGE but subsequently in the erection of a memorial building set in the rhododendron haven he had envisaged. And it is the story of this iconic little 'hut' from its inception to its surprising relocation which forms the focal point of the book. Woven into this tale are so many fascinating insights into the moving times which take in the general societal and environmental changes and perceptions as well as following the development of the RBGE and particularly the garden at Benmore that we can enjoy today.

The book is short and very sweet – a perfect mixture of people and places, both of which will be familiar to fellow students of rhododendron and garden history, factual but inescapably romantic at times with its evocative images of this much loved little building and its dramatic settings.

Pam Hayward

#### MEMBERS' NOTES

### A companion tree in a rhododendron garden

Companion plants for our three genera can provide as much pleasure as the genera themselves. When considering companions I tend to think of herbaceous species, such as *Meconopsis*, lilies, *Nomocharis* and the like, forgetting things such as kalmias and stewartias.

Travel broadens the mind, and driving through Yunnan in 1996 we were ascending a very steep and steeply sided valley, with a raging torrent about twenty feet below the road. At the bottom of this valley and lining it for several hundred yards, were small trees with sharp yellow flowers in profusion. As far as I was concerned, these trees were 'neither read of in books nor dreamt of in dreams'. (Apologies to *The Jackdaw of Rheims*). The minibus was stopped so we could see a little more detail and our leader, Janet Cubey, advised us that the trees were *Cornus capitata*. They were glorious. After returning home and seeing my slides several times I realized that all of these cornus had their 'feet' in the water, which was highly oxygenated and far from stagnant. A lesson learned.



*Cornus capitata* grown from seed in Ted's garden. Photo: Angela Brabin



I determined to try it and obtained seed from a well known seed merchant in Cumbria. Seed germinated well and I kept and planted out two specimens, now about twenty feet tall and bedecked with flowers in late May/early June. The conspicuous bracts, whilst certainly yellow, are not as brightly coloured as in China – perhaps something to do with light intensity. Whilst flowering prolifically, this display in spring is but one delight – the second coming in late November/early December, when the branches are weighed down with large fruits, an inch to an inch and a half wide and strawberry coloured. Once perfectly ripe the blackbirds delight in them and at the time of writing in late November are feasting on them. The inevitable consequence is that seedlings germinate all over my garden and probably in my neighbours' gardens as well. The fruits are not harmful to humans but one fruit will do for a lifetime!



Fruit of *Cornus capitata*. Photo: Angela Brabin

The species is evergreen and looks a bit untidy in spring when it sheds some older leaves. Unlike some deciduous cornus it does not display any autumn colours. Bean writes that it is hopeless to grow this species unprotected near London. Climate change seems to have rendered this advice out of date. However, in 2010, when autumn slid very gently to winter, we had a very cold week in late November, when for seven days temperatures dropped to  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  at night with daytime figures around freezing. This caused major bark split as the plants had not readied themselves for winter. One of my pair died and I cut off the dead trunk, to be rewarded a year later with two suckers, now about twenty feet tall. The species takes a little longer to flower than *C. kousa*, for example, but is well worth the wait.

Ted Brabin

### Whatever became of *Rhododendron malvaticum*?

Around the 1950s and 60s, Dutch wholesale nursery catalogues would arrive on my desk containing a section headed "Malvatica Hybrids". As far as I can remember there were about 10 or 12 of these and I regret never trying them.

For at least thirty years I have had in my garden a small shrub labelled 'Rhododendron malvaticum'. It is about 1m high by 1m through with ovate leaves 4 to 5cm long, up to 2cm wide, covered

both above and below with short hairs, as are the young stems. It never fails to flower well with abundant, 5cm diameter, rose-purple blooms, 4 or 5 to the truss. And this is in an unlikely situation for an azalea: the deep shade of a Bhutan Pine.

An article in the RHS *Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book* [1967] by T. H. Findlay entitled 'Kurume and Malvatica Hybrids for the Smaller Garden' has aroused my curiosity about this plant. Mr. Findlay has set out to describe six of his favourites from this group but never mentions *R. malvaticum* as being a parent of any of them but instead names *R. kaempferi* as a parent. Pertinent to this in the first edition of *Hillier's Manual of Trees and Shrubs*, kaempferi hybrids, it is stated, were produced by crossing *R. kaempferi* with *R. malvaticum*. Some that I suspect were a result of that union were 'Arendsii', 'Atlanta', 'Carmen', 'Fedora', 'Jeanette', 'John Bock' and 'Kathleen'.

None of the editions of the *Rhododendron Handbook* mention *R. malvaticum* and the name does not appear in any other rhododendron reference book that I possess, but there is a complex which some deal with rather vaguely involving *R. macrosepalum*, *R. stenopetalum* and *R. ripense*. From the descriptions of these species, *R. stenopetalum* most closely fits my *R. malvaticum* but if there are any of our members out there who can throw a positive light on this matter, their information would be very welcome.

Barry Starling

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## ‘Bluebell’ or ‘Blue Bell’?

Does it really matter whether the name of a commonly available purple-blue rhododendron cultivar is written as ‘Blue Bell’ or ‘Bluebell’? In the past, these cultivar names have often been mixed up and even treated as synonyms. However, they are two different cultivars, one by A. Waterer and the other by C.B. van Nes.

Sloccock named the cultivar raised by Waterer as ‘Bluebell’ (Knap Hill) (c.1882). A description and a illustration were published in *The Florist and Pomologist, and Suburban Gardener: A Pictorial Magazine of Horticulture and Register of Garden Novelties* (1884). See Fig. 1 for the illustration and Fig. 2 for the description.

Another plant was introduced as ‘Blue Bell’ by C.B. van Nes (c.1932) and it clearly differs from the Waterer ‘Bluebell’. See Fig. 3 on the Front Cover.

I visited Sofiero Castle in South Sweden on my way home to Finland, after attending the *Nordic Rhododendron Symposium* in Bergen in June 2003, and collected pollen in the castle park from several rhododendrons. One of the most thrilling was a rhododendron which had beautiful purple-blue flowers with strong yellow-orange blotch. On the nameplate was written ‘Blue Bell’. Based on information I found from literature and web pages, I wrongly assumed it to be ‘Bluebell’ from Waterer. According to an article written about Sofiero, Waterer’s hybrids were planted in the castle park in 1937 and among them were, for example, ‘Blue bell’ [sic], ‘Blue Peter’ and ‘Pink Pearl’. Maybe it wasn’t Waterer’s ‘Bluebell’ at all, because the name was spelled with a space? Or perhaps the cultivar ‘Blue Bell’ by van Nes (c. 1932) had been planted later at Sofiero? Peter A. Cox and Kenneth N.E. Cox described ‘Blue Bell’ in the *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids* (1988) saying that “There is some confusion here, with one plant named ‘Blue Bell’ by van Nes and another (name illegal) raised by Waterer, Knaphill and named by Sloccock”. An extract of the full description is shown in Fig. 4.

The ‘Bluebell’ raised by Waterer is described in the Second Edition of *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (2004). The ‘Blue Bell’ by van Nes is referred to in parenthesis based on information given by Cox & Cox (*Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids*. 1988). An extract of the description is shown in Fig. 5.

In the summer of 2004 I made a number of crosses for improved hardiness using pollen of ‘Blue Bell’. As a result, I have registered the cultivar names ‘Eija’, ‘Pernilla’ and ‘Becca’ in 2017 and these cultivars are now in commercial production, see Fig. 6.

In 2017 I was still unsure of the true identity of the ‘Blue Bell’ at Sofiero, as there was conflicting information. I exchanged correspondence with the then International Rhododendron Registrar, Dr. Alan Leslie, regarding the origin of ‘Blue Bell’. Alan compared the image I had taken of ‘Blue Bell’ at Sofiero to the many images he retrieved from the web and to the 1884 illustration of Waterer’s ‘Bluebell’; he also examined the descriptions of both cultivars.

Dr. Leslie wrote to me on 29.9.2017:

“The Waterer plant seems to have much less of a blotch, which is such a feature of the other plant. The blotch colour can clearly change with age, but it may also be significant that the Waterer plant consistently has a white and green style, whereas in the other plant it is white and purplish pink. I would say also that generally the coloured border is broader in what I take to be the van Nes plant, especially on the two lateral dorsal lobes. One assumes the artist depicted the plant correctly!”

“I think there is no doubt that the two have been confused and that some of the big-blotched van Nes variety have been listed as the Waterer one.”

Alan had also consulted Ken Cox and asked whether he had a photo of Waterer’s ‘Bluebell’. Ken sent a photo that turned out to match the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’.

In 2018 I bought a plant from Hachmann Nursery that had the name ‘Bluebell’ – I found it to be van Nes ‘Blue Bell’. It seems that German nurseries sell the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’ as Waterer’s ‘Bluebell’.

In the *Deutsche Genbank Rhododendron* web database ‘Blue Bell’ and ‘Bluebell’ have been entered as synonyms. The title of the web page is “*Rhododendron* ‘Bluebell’, Waterer (Knap Hill) (vor 1882)”, but the photos show the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’. I corresponded with Odo Tschetsch about the issue and he answered my questions on 25.9.2020 as follows:

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I followed the expertise of Walter Schmalscheidt, who said that there have been two different plants by Waterer and van Nes, but now the names are used as synonyms. Has anybody seen the original Waterer cultivar? Do you know where to find it?”

Anyway, the plants depicted are clearly the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’, so I will keep an eye on the matter.”

Miranda Gunn from Ramster Gardens asked on the RCMG social media site whether the plant they had in the garden was Waterer’s ‘Bluebell’ or the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’. I wrote an email to Miranda about my investigations and told her that the plant seemed to be the van Nes hybrid.

Graham Mills forwarded an email I sent him to Pam Hayward for further research. Pam wrote to me on 28.9.2020 as follows:

“I will now start to look at our historic collections to see if we can identify the real thing. Waterer’s plant is very graceful and much more delicate than the VN plant and it would be wonderful to track it down.”

The images found on web pages are consistently the van Nes ‘Blue Bell’, although they are often claimed to be the Waterer cultivar. Maybe the genuine Waterer ‘Bluebell’ is still growing in some garden or park? Do get in touch if you believe you can help locate this apparently lost beauty.

Kristian Theqvist, Finland  
kristian.theqvist@rhodogarden.com





Fig. 1. Waterer 'Bluebell'. Illustration from *The Florist and Pomologist*, ... (1884).

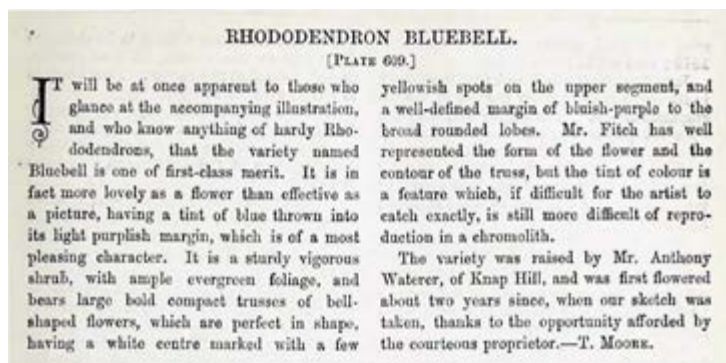


Fig. 2. Description of the Waterer 'Bluebell' from *The Florist and Pomologist*, ... (1884).

## BLUE BELL cl.?

(unknown)

C.B. van Nes int. 1932

—5f/—21c? M Medium

There is some confusion here with one plant named 'Blue Bell' by van Nes and another (name illegal) raised by Waterer, Knaphill and named by Slocock. It appears that both are bluish with a light centre and the parents of neither are known. We think the one described below refers to the van Nes plant only. Flowers purple-blue with a light centre and a blotch. The foliage is inferior and the habit floppy. Not easy to root and not always free flowering, but grown for its unusual colouring. Available in Europe. The Knaphill-Slocock plant has deep violet flowers with an orange-yellow centre and is tall growing. Occasionally available in U.K.

Fig. 4. Description of the van Nes 'Blue Bell' from Cox & Cox, *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids* (1988).

(r) 'Bluebell' cv. Parentage unknown R: Waterer (Knap Hill) (c 1882), INC: ICRA (1958) Fls in large, compact trusses, campanulate, with broadly rounded lobes, white at centre, with a well-defined bluish purple margin and a few yellowish spots on the dorsal lobe. Sturdy, vigorous shrub. (Description of the original plant at Knap Hill published as 'Bluebell' (with a coloured plate) in *The Florist and Pomologist*, 1884). (According to Cox & Cox (*Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids*. 1988) another plant was introduced, as 'Blue Bell', by C.B. van Nes in 1932. They consider this to have purple blue fls with a light centre and a blotch and to be a shrub of slightly floppy habit. Both are considered to be still in cultivation)

Fig. 5. Extract from *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (2004).

Continued overleaf



Fig 6. Three registered cultivars hybridised and raised by Kristian Theqvist. From left to right: 'Eija', 'Pernilla' and 'Becca'. Seed parents have been hardy Finnish cultivars and pollen from van Nes 'Blue Bell'. It is apparent that the strong blotch of 'Blue Bell' has been well inherited.

## Notes from Glenarn: *Rhododendron dendricola*

**O**n page 302 of Peter and Kenneth Cox's *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species* is a photograph, captioned 'R. dendricola Kingdon-Ward 21512 from the Triangle, N. Burma (formerly labelled R. supranubium) at Glenarn, W. Scotland'.

Until Pam Hayward asked if this rhododendron was still here, we had rather overlooked or forgotten about this image. Also, initially, I was a little confused by Pam's enquiry as *Rhododendron supranubium* is a synonymic name for *R. pachypodum* (as is also *R. scottianum*, which we do have here, and goes back to a cutting we had taken – with permission – from a plant so labelled in the quarry below the pond at Colonsay House, the original now long gone). As usual Pam had set a hare running.

Archie and Sandy Gibson, who started the rhododendron collection at Glenarn, knew *Rhododendron dendricola* as *R. supranubium*. They recorded it on card 357 under Forrest number F27109 which was subsequently crossed out. In the *Rhododendron Handbook* this number is *R. ciliicalyx*. The entry on the card reads: "December 1937 Magor 6 inches. Still in the Greenhouse 1938" all crossed out with "RIP" added. I think we can say that, whatever it was, it is no more. The entry continues: "2 seedlings ex. Brodick 6 inches Dec. 1957".

However (and this shows how garden records are not what they always seem) if we go to card 435 *Rhododendron ciliicalyx* we find: "KW 21512 Brodick Seedlings May 1955, 6 plants in permanent places Sept 1957. Afraid RIP even before winters 1962/63" all crossed out with the words "No tallies" added, to confirm their demise and the fact that there was no need for labels when the Gibsons undertook a major re-labelling exercise in 1963.

We bought Glenarn in May 1983 and that autumn went to see Peter Cox at Glendoick who advised that we should wait for a whole season to see what we had got; we should only cut down and remove dead plants, fallen timber and the like. For the first couple of years we gradually moved around the garden, heeding the instructions and clearing through the undergrowth. We discovered that the labels had dropped off the rhododendrons and could often be found in the leaf litter and, gathering them up, drew sketch maps recording their locations. Looking at these maps now, I can see that we had found a label, behind where the Gibsons had successfully grown *Rhododendron lindleyi* from Ludlow and Sherriff's 1938 expedition, underneath a pile of logs. It appeared to have read: "R. supranubium 1959 Seedlings [unreadable]". The labels were often difficult to decipher, the ink sometimes having worn away to leave only a faint imprint on the zinc material. I could have easily misread 1959 for 1957 and that the missing word may be "Brodick" and that this was the logical and favourable site for the only *R. supranubium* that the Gibsons had not written off as dead.

A further complication is that Ed Wright presented us with a plant of *Rhododendron supranubium* in April 1984, on the inaugural garden visit of the newly formed Scottish Rhododendron Society, when they came to Glenarn to check that we were not cutting down all the rhododendrons (and where

the new members were entertained in the house which was in the process of being partly demolished and renovated). This was an ambitious as well as generous gift of a plant that is known to be tender (like the recipients who were only just beginning to learn about rhododendrons). Whether by accident or design I cannot remember, but it was planted almost exactly where the old label had been found. This was a long time ago, before we sorted things out, and *R. supranubium* disappeared from view. Occasionally we go up to the site and look at all of the *Maddenia* which are crowded into that corner of the garden and wonder if any of them are what is now called *R. dendricola*, either from Brodick or Arduaine, or even both. I will report back if we make any progress on identification, spurred on by Pam's enquiry.

This is not quite the unsatisfactory end of the story. We know that Sandy Gibson was friendly with the formidable Lady Jean fford, daughter of the Duchess of Montrose who created the rhododendron garden at Brodick, which she described in the *Rhododendron Year Book 1951-52 No. 6*. Sandy often stayed there and we have photographs of a visit to Brodick when he was the chairman of the National Trust for Scotland's garden committee (see below). The records show that in May 1955, *Rhododendron supranubium* was only one of 29 batches of seedlings of different species of rhododendrons which the Gibsons acquired from Brodick on that visit, all of them with Kingdon-Ward's collection numbers from his 1953 Triangle expedition. About a quarter were large leaved rhododendrons, most of which have not survived, but important plants that are still in the garden include *R. luteiflorum* (KW 21040), *R. chrysodoron* (KW 20878) – the subject of more taxonomic hare running – and the rare *R. zaleucum* var. *flaviflorum* (KW 20837)



A visit from the NTS Garden Committee to Brodick: Sandy Gibson is at the centre and the young John Basford is on the right. He was the head gardener for many years and must have started recently when that photo was taken. I was intending to see if the National Trust for Scotland could tell me his dates at Brodick as it would give a clue to the date of the photo. I have tried to find who is the genial chap on the left, even showing him to Peter Cox, but with no luck. Intriguingly, the photo (and I don't know who gave it to us a long time ago) has written on the back 'Me Sandy Gibson John Basford'. Photographer unknown.

The last word should go to Peter Cox. I phoned him to ask if he could remember anything about the photograph of *Rhododendron dendricola* and the caption. He said it must have been taken in our time, which was as worrying as it is hopeful,



but he went on to say that he thought that many of the so-called species are one and the same – or at least not so distinct from each other as to merit specific status.

Mike Thornley

## Rhododendrons at Hergest Croft

### The early years: 1895 to 1910

To set the scene, the gardens at Hergest Croft are high, between 700 and 900 feet up, wet with annual rainfall averaging about 42 inches, and mild with winter minimum temperatures usually no lower than around –8° Celsius. Springs are late and late frosts infrequent. Summers are mild and extreme heat and drought rare, although there seems to be a recent tendency for less summer rain. The pH is around 6.5 but leaf litter adds to the acidity. The garden is well sheltered by Hergest Ridge to the west and woodland to the north. Microclimates vary widely and there are parts of the garden where we can grow really quite tender plants. In all a pretty good place to grow rhododendrons.



Hardy Hybrids including *R. 'Fastuosum Flore Pleno'* flowering in the Avenue at Hergest Croft

My grandfather William Hartland Banks (WHB) and his wife Dorothy (née Alford) met when both read Natural Sciences at Cambridge and it is worth mentioning that he got a Third and she got a First – although no degree as women were not eligible. They married in 1894 and started to lay out the garden in 1895. Prior to that, his father Richard William had planted quite widely including exotic trees, but as far as I know, few if any, rhododendrons. The garden around the house was laid out by them on the principles of William Robinson as set out in *The English Flower Garden*, with no outside designer employed. Hybrid rhododendrons played a big part in the planting and many remain today as huge plants. Identification is not simple and records of this period are sparse. But 'lockdown' enabled Elizabeth and I to do quite a lot of work on these plants. We found the most useful book to be Dick van Gelderen and Dick van Hoey Smith's *Rhododendron Portraits*, as these hardy plants remain popular in Holland but are certainly out of fashion in Britain

Amongst the oldest are big plants of *R. 'Fastuosum Flore Pleno'* a mid-19th century hybrid of *R. catawbiense* and *R. ponticum*, and *R. 'Old Port'*, the same cross made by Waterer in 1865 and maybe the darkest purple of all. There is no surviving record of where these came from but I think it probable that it was Waterers from whom WHB certainly bought. There is a large group of hybrids of *R. griffithianum*, which have a distinctive inflorescence, including

'Loder's White', 'Pink Pearl' and 'Geoffrey Millais'. Possible sources include CB van Nes and Mangles. There is a big plant of the charming but little grown 'Mrs TH Lowinsky'; this was bred by Waterers but could have come from Thomas Lowinsky at Tittenhurst Park near Ascot, with whom WHB was in contact. Lowinsky made a fortune running the mines for the Nizam of Hyderabad and then spent it all on gardening! By this time, space in the garden was full and planting was expanding up the hill to Hergest Ridge, in the area now known as the Azalea garden.



*Rhododendron* 'Mrs J G Millais' at Hergest Croft

A little later on came many of the different forms of *Rhododendron* Loderi Group itself (*griffithianum* x *fortunei*) when they were finally released from the Loder garden at Leonardslee. These brought a new element into the garden because of their rich scent that perfumes the air in May and June.



'Koster's Yellow' in the Azalea Garden Photos: Elizabeth Banks

During the 1920s he added the extensive planting of deciduous azaleas, starting with Ghents and moving on to Exbury and Knap Hill hybrids; there are a number of named clones including a splendid group of 'Koster's Yellow' and the exquisite hose-in-

*Continued overleaf*



hose 'Corneille' but many of them were bought as seedlings in a kaleidoscope of colours, many of which clashed violently. When my father and mother set to work in the 1950s they carefully sorted them out into an harmonious pattern, an example that could usefully be followed elsewhere where collections dazzle rather than delight.

WHB's next venture was planting the woodland garden in Park Wood that he bought in 1912. *To be continued...*

Lawrence Banks CBE VMH

### A Brief History of Reuthe's Nursery

Like many of us, I have found it necessary to travel further afield from my home to discover a wider range of rhododendrons and other ericaceous plants of the type I enjoy growing.

One such nursery I found many years ago was Reuthe's. It was created by Gustavus Reuthe who was born in Germany in 1856. He hated the way his home country was becoming militarised, so he emigrated to England in the late 1800s, where he met and married Elizabeth.



'Seven Men and a Buoy' - a delightful image of a group of men including Gustavus Reuthe, taken in 1898 at St. Ives

Gustavus (pictured above, second from the left, standing) and his wife lived and worked around North London. It was here their first son Harold was born. When Walter, their second son, was born in 1902, they moved to Keston in Kent to start their own nursery.

The first nursery was set up in Nash Lane but they did not stay there long before moving to Jackass Lane under the business title Foxhill Nursery. When old enough, Gustavus's sons, Harold and Walter, helped him in the business, which unfortunately was interrupted by the First World War.

Harold, his older son, refused to fight against his father's homeland. He was found guilty for his actions, interned and subsequently sentenced to three years' hard labour. Walter (pictured above right) joined the artillery. Both sons married after the war, Harold to Mabel and Walter to Hilda Margaret.



Walter Reuthe

The nursery had been entering and winning shows from very early on, both at the Westminster and the RHS Chelsea shows. In 1926, Gustavus acquired Crown Point Nursery at Ightham in Kent. The administration of Crown Point was still run from their Keston base. His reputation as a nurseryman and for showing carried on growing and in 1938 he was awarded the VMH.

The reason for the new nursery was that the ground at Foxhill Nursery had been too alkaline and stony, limiting them to what they felt they could grow. However, a new problem they found was that Crown Point was too acidic in places and where necessary, the ground had to be limed before rhododendrons and other ericaceous plants, which they loved, could be grown directly in the soil rather than in pots.

After the First World War, both sons returned to the business to carry on with the work in hand. Harold took over the accounting side of the nursery, leaving Walter to concentrate on running the plant side. By now, the nursery hybridising programme was in full swing producing many well-known rhododendrons. Also, they were winning numerous gold medals for their show gardens. Show gardens were much larger then and the competition much stiffer.

Colin Tomlin joined the nursery in 1963 as a young lad and remembers when plants grown at Crown Point were dug up to order, put on an old lorry and driven to Keston for packaging.





Gene Reuthe at Crown Point Nursery

They were then taken to Hayes railway station on a hand cart for distribution around the UK and to ports if for export. Harold and Walter carried on running Reuthe's up to the late 1970s and then Walter's son Eugene took over.

Penny (Tomlin) joined the company in 1978 and worked in the office for Eugene (Gene Reuthe pictured above). After many years, Colin and Penny left the nursery to start their own – Starborough Nursery near Edenbridge, Kent. They specialised in species and hybrid rhododendrons, very rare and difficult to find trees and shrubs, and they also took on landscaping contracts for clients who bought their stock. By 1992 the new nursery was well established, but when the chance came to acquire Crown Point from the Reuthe family they decided to purchase it. Keston had already been sold two or three years earlier.

Times had changed since the Westminster shows at Vincent Square and Chelsea was now becoming the ultimate show in which the Reuthe family won gold medals with their spectacular flower show stands.

Their stands also won trade awards including the Rothschild Challenge Cup which Colin believes Reuthe's won more than any other nursery.



One of the spectacular displays for which Reuthe's became famous

Colin and Penny (pictured overleaf) continued the tradition to exhibit at Chelsea and won yet more gold medals and cups until they decided to stop. In 2016, after 24 years running both Starborough and Reuthe's, they decided that running two nurseries had become too onerous and that age and health were catching up with them, so they decided to sell Reuthe's.

*Continued overleaf*



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Classic Reuthe Rhododendrons: 'Soldier Sam', 'Pyrex', 'Barbara Reuthe'  
Photos: Pinecroft



Penny and Colin Tomlin with two of the many Best in Show and Best Trade Exhibit trophies awarded to Reuthe's. Photographer unknown.

Penny and Colin continue running Starborough Nursery. Colin is still an active RHS judge and steward who travels many miles to undertake these duties at the major shows around the country.

Some of the key workers at Reuthe's through the years were:

FW Collinson (Teddy) – Nursery Foreman

Ivor Stanger – Manager of Crown Point

Bob Watson – Manager of Crown Point

Tom Belcher – Foreman

David Sampson – Propagator

John Lehooker – Propagator

John Harding – Propagator

A few famous rhododendron hybrids bred or raised by Reuthe's are:

'Princess Anne'

'Sonata'

'Ightham Yellow'

'Soldier Sam' – named after Walter whose middle name was Samuel.

'Katy Watson' – named after Penny's mother

'Penny Tomlin'

'Nightingale'

'Bandoola'

'Daphne Jewess'

'Popacatapetl'

'Pyrex'

'Hilda Margaret'

There are many more well-known rhododendrons that were raised by them, unfortunately too many to list for this article, but all are in the official register. One of these that I really like is 'Barbara Reuthe'.

*Continued overleaf*



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We are disappointed that we could not find any pictures of Harold, but as far as we are aware, he led a very contented and happy life after his internment.

Information from UK obituaries:

Gustavus Reuthe died 1942

Elizabeth Reuthe, Gustavus's wife, died 1927

Harold Reuthe died 1982

Mabel Reuthe, Harold's wife, died 1968

Walter Reuthe died 1976

Hilda Margaret, Walter's wife, died 1993

Eugene Reuthe died 2013

The more than 100 year history of the nursery now lives on under new ownership.

I have no doubt that one could write a book about Reuthe's Nursery as there is much more to tell, but this does give a brief glimpse of their achievements and contribution to our Group.

#### Footnote:

Whether it is a nursery or our own gardens, it should be remembered that we are just custodians of these places. It is marvellous that we can make notes and records of these people, but it is the plants they created and the fine specimens they collected that really matter, and the nursery stock properly catalogued and recorded so that they cannot disappear.

*Andy Fly*

#### MEMBERSHIP

**W**e welcome the following new members and hope they will enjoy the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

#### ESTONIA

Mr Rhio Teras Tartu, Estonia

#### UK

Mr Geoffrey Turner Gunnislake, Cornwall

Mr Chris Groves St Dominick, Saltash, Cornwall

Mr David John Williams London

Mr Richard John Williams Gorran, Redruth, Cornwall

Burncoose Nurseries, c/o Mr CH Williams, Gwennap, Cornwall

Joanne Court Eggesford, Launceston, Cornwall

Mr Brian Elliot Launceston, Cornwall

Mr Rhydian Wynn-Williams North Disney,

Lincolnshire

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#### Seed List Matters

**P**erhaps this little piece should really be titled 'The seed list matters'!

First of all, can I thank everyone who has supported the 2021 Seed List as either a donor or someone who has placed an order. Without either, this important part of the Group's services would disappear.

As we go into the spring and flowering commences, could I once again implore you to get hand-pollinating rhododendron species for us to include in the 2022 list. The database project is already revealing just how many rarities and special plants are in our midst and even one effort on your part to hand-pollinate a known species could make a difference. As you know, it's just a matter of getting to the flower before the bee does! Please get in touch if you would like help and instructions – it's really easy once you get the hang of it.

Maybe you would also like to try your hand at cross-pollination and have a hybrid in mind – do have a go this year. We are all up for a challenge! I can even help with sourcing pollen if that might make your idea a reality. Think about all our legendary hybridisers and the bounty of their imaginations we are growing in our gardens today. All it takes is a simple step at flowering time to get that dream underway.

Over the years the number of complimentary plants coming onto the Seed List has increased dramatically; a really 'good thing', helping us to diversify our gardens and make us better all-round gardeners. Keep this going, send seed of your favourites and help us learn what else we could be growing!

And keep an eye on camellias towards the end of the year; raising camellias from seed is really rewarding and very often they are quicker to flower than rhododendrons.

The mechanics of magnolia breeding is something we should perhaps be investigating more for future seed lists. Perhaps someone will contribute an article giving us step-by-step instructions for a future edition?

Meanwhile, we are always happy to take open-pollinated seed of all our genera and other trees, shrubs and complimentary plants. Whatever it takes to keep the Seed List alive and vibrant is most welcome!

*Pam Hayward*

pam@woodtown.net

**Please send event updates to Wendelin Morrison  
Email: events@rhodogroup-rhs.org**