



# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Bulletin 114 / March 2014 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

**T**he Chairman has had much to do for the Group in the last year, not to mention his work commitments abroad, and we make no apology for restating a portion of his letter to all members, sent in December:

**"After many months of negotiation, our Committee has now overwhelmingly approved the Partnership Agreement with the RHS which it is confident will enable the Group to continue its role and activities in the manner to which we are accustomed. The RHS agrees to license our use of the RHS Group Logo for all Group publications etc and also will authorise our continued use of the title 'RHS Rhododendron Camellia & Magnolia Group'".**

The Chairman has subsequently signed the Agreement on behalf of the Group. Whilst the Committee's heartfelt wish is that the life of the Group can now return to normal it must, as the Chairman also indicated in his letter, attend to three issues of governance:

1. The drafting and presentation to a future General Meeting of an appropriate new Constitution
2. The protection of the Group and its Committee by acquiring legal limited liability status
3. The possibility of the Group acquiring charitable status.

All members will be tremendously grateful to Andy and his team for their persistence in a difficult situation and understand their relief at this light at the end of the tunnel. We can also look forward to supporting them at the General Meeting when it comes and share their pleasure at getting back to their and our primary interest – the plants, and the good flowering season which seems to be arriving. The review of the Early Spring Show at Rosemoor (*see this Bulletin*) promises much for later Shows which we can all enjoy.

## CONGRATULATIONS

**T**he Group would like to record and congratulate Andy Simons, our Chairman, on his recently awarded OBE. Andy received his award in his professional life in recognition of his services to Defence Information Capability.

Members would also like to congratulate Peter Cox on the award of an MBE, 'for services to horticulture and plant exploration', in recognition of a lifetime of bringing our wonderful genera to public notice.



*Rhododendron 'Pink Gin'*

Photo: Robin Whiting

## AN URGENT APPEAL

**Y**our support is needed now to help us continue to grow and enjoy our Rhododendrons and other plants!

Two pieces of proposed legislation are currently going through the European Parliament, which could have a significant impact on the range of plants we can grow, including rhododendrons. Members are reminded that elections to the Parliament are taking place in May and that these issues are something to raise with candidates in your region.

The draft PRM (Plant Reproductive Material) Regulation extends the current legislation in relation to agricultural crops and vegetables to cover ornamental plants too. It is conservatively estimated that there are over 70,000 different varieties of ornamental plants on the market, and under the legislation each one would need to have a technical description to enable it to be registered for propagation for sale. The cost to do this could be as much as £500 per variety. It should be emphasised that this would not apply to plants exchanged between individuals, where there is no intent to put the material into commercial propagation. As you can imagine, seedling plants raised by gardeners with different characteristics would prove a nightmare.

*Continued overleaf*

After intense lobbying by the horticultural industry, the EU parliament rejected the bill on 10th March by a landmark 650 votes to 15. The EU Commission needs to take the legislation to the Council of Ministers, but it is now looking increasingly likely that the legislation will be substantially redrafted later in the year after the new Parliament is elected and new Commissioners are in place. This gives us a chance to raise the matter with our potential representatives as they seek election.

The other piece of legislation is concerning invasive non-native species (or invasive 'alien' species) and aims to introduce strict control measures for species causing widespread economic and environmental problems across the EU. The tightest measures relate to species considered to be of 'Union Concern' and involve a ban on import, transport, trade or even growing or keeping a listed species. In England and Wales we already list 39 species of plants as illegal to plant, or cause to plant, in the wild, including such species as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. This month sees the introduction of a ban on trading five aquatic aliens that are causing a great deal of problems across the UK. However, there is currently no provision for a ban on possession in UK law. While it is not known which species will be listed, there is some concern that well known garden plants, such as hardy hybrids with *Rhododendron ponticum* in their parentage could be affected. This is of greater concern to us, as specialist growers, because the definition of 'species' includes hybrids or any selections or varieties of that species.

While this issue was raised by the RHS at a hearing of the UK Parliament's Environment Audit Committee in January 2014, and highlighted in recent articles in the press, there is a high level of support for this legislation and its imminent passage through the European Parliament in its current form seems unassailable. While the greater purpose of the legislation is commendable we do need to make decision-makers aware of the possible unintended consequences for innocuous and worthy garden plants. A personal letter to your MP drawing his or her attention to our concerns about this matter would be of great help in presenting our cause in the most informed and responsible way.

Attention is rightly being focussed on the strategy for implementation of this legislation. The RHS and the Horticultural Trades Association are working with Defra to secure the best possible outcome for our shared interests. As this is a developing situation which is changing day by day, it is vital for us to be alert, fully appraised of the facts and recognise where we can exert our own influences in the most effective and productive way. As well as visiting the Group website [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org) for developing Group policy and ways to get involved, members are encouraged to visit the following website links regularly for updates:

- [www.rhs.org.uk/News/eu-plant-legislation](http://www.rhs.org.uk/News/eu-plant-legislation)
- [www.rhs.org.uk/News/eu-non-natives-legislation](http://www.rhs.org.uk/News/eu-non-natives-legislation)
- [www.the-hta.org.uk/page.php?pageid=42](http://www.the-hta.org.uk/page.php?pageid=42)

or to find the name and contact details of your MEP visit [www.europarl.org.uk/en/your\\_meps/list-meps-by-region.html](http://www.europarl.org.uk/en/your_meps/list-meps-by-region.html)

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Peter Furneaux

I tentatively responded to the request in the previous Bulletin for help in its production. (I have little or no previous experience.) This was enthusiastically welcomed by John Rawling, who has edited the Bulletin for the past thirteen years, and wished to retire for reasons of health. Thankfully, he is continuing to help me to get on my feet which is a great blessing! John has developed the Bulletin during his time as editor into an attractive record of the Group's activities, a lively forum for news and discussion and a useful diary of future events. The Group will want to thank him for this and wish him well for the future.

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The Group publishes your letters, articles, reports from branches, future events etc, to keep the members up to date!

**Contributions for the next Bulletin No.115  
will be very welcome**

Please send by email to: [peterfurneaux@gmail.com](mailto:peterfurneaux@gmail.com)  
or post to Peter Furneaux  
Lucton Court, Lucton, Herefordshire HR6 9PQ

## An important date for your diary!

### Sandling Park

is one of the legendary gardens located on the greensand in Kent. It is famed for its historic woodland gardens with significant plantings of trees and shrubs in natural settings and an important collection of rhododendrons.



Once again the garden will be open to the public for **one day** only

**Sunday May 11th 2014**

All proceeds will go to *Pilgrims Hospices* – a specialist palliative care charity. For details visit:

[www.pilgrimshospices.org/events/sandling-park-open-garden-2014/](http://www.pilgrimshospices.org/events/sandling-park-open-garden-2014/)

**Do take the opportunity to visit Sandling Park  
if you are able – you will not regret it !**

SANDLING PARK, SANDLING, HYTHE, KENT CT21 4HN



## SHOW TIME!

### Regional Shows around the country

Over the last few years more and more Shows have moved out of Vincent Square, and the challenge has been to establish them in the regions. This gives us the opportunity to re-assess what is needed for members, and brings the revival of interest in Shows to wider regional groups. The Main Rhododendron Competition held at RHS Rosemoor was the first of our genera to move, and through the hard work of Pam Hayward and a local team, the Show has developed over the years into a beacon for others to follow. Further endorsement of the move was received in 2012 when the RHS decided to host the Early Camellia Competition at Rosemoor as well, so there are now two Shows each year with accompanying SW Branch competitions. Now the challenge is to follow that format at Wisley and Harlow Carr which will mean that most UK members are within one and a half hour's drive of a really good Show. Here you will have the opportunity to meet up, exhibit and chat with fellow enthusiasts from the same area.

Last year the Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental Plant competitions finally moved out of London to RHS Wisley, saving exhibitors the trouble of dealing with traffic, Congestion Charges and the worry of parking fines. This first Show at Wisley, despite great efforts, was not a total success, mainly due to the very cold spring which meant that there were far fewer blooms than usual. As with all first time ventures, there were a lot of lessons learned; these were documented and the exhibitors also provided constructive comments, all of which have been considered going forward to this year. These Shows continue to be a 'work in progress' to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the arrangements and that the public get to experience a spectacular display of the very best examples of our three genera.

This year, Georgina Barter and the RHS Shows team, aided by Sally Hayward and others in the Group, are on track to produce a Show to rival the fantastic ones now being staged at RHS Rosemoor. **The Show will take place at RHS Wisley on April 12th and 13th** and exhibits have been promised from most of the leading Rhododendron gardens in the South East of England including Exbury, Windsor Great Park, High Beeches, Isabella Plantation and many National Trust and large gardens throughout the region. The Camellia exhibits are being run in conjunction with the International Camellia Society, and competition winners will be presented with ICS awards as well as the much coveted RHS Leonardslee Bowl. In addition, ten magnolia classes have been added to the Spring Ornamental Plant Competition schedule.

Novice competitors are especially being encouraged to exhibit for the first time and I shall be running workshop sessions to help members understand what is necessary to present the best blooms on a Show bench. After judging, I will be taking a guided tour around the Rhododendron benches to look at the winners and try to explain the judging, and to point out any particularly interesting plants for comments. Pat Short will do a similar tour of the Camellia benches, and we hope to arrange tours of Magnolias and the Spring Ornamental Competition.

Wisley is an easy drive for nearly everyone in the South East, and there will be special exhibitor parking adjacent to the large marquee erected near the Restaurant for the start of the Wisley Gardening Week. Wisley staff are joining in the activities, and we are delighted to have RHS Executive Vice President Jim Gardiner



Rosemoor Show

Photo: David Millais

presenting the prizes on Saturday. On both days, Wisley Curator, Colin Crosbie, and his assistant Lucie Tait are giving guided tours of the Rhododendron collections on Battleston Hill and the Wild Garden, and these are sure to be popular. Please check out the times of the events on the RCM website.

**The Main Rhododendron Competition will be held at RHS Rosemoor on April 26th and 27th.** This is a great event and is well worth supporting with some of your prized blooms.

The regional Show at RHS Harlow Carr last year was also a first, and although there were few exhibitors, those that came brought many stunning and rare plants of exceptional quality. Thanks go to the Himalayan Garden, and John Grimshaw at Castle Howard in particular. One class had 22 entries, and there were exquisite examples of *Rhododendron ochraceum*, *R. iodes*, *R. pingianum*, *R. crinigerum*, *R. kesangiae* and *R. dendrocharis*. All these interesting exhibits encouraged visitors to linger and ask questions, so there is plenty of opportunity to 'spread the word' and encourage new membership. **The Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition is to be held this year on May 10th and 11th** and the Show is again in the Bramall Learning Centre, and will augment the extensive Rhododendron collection flowering in the gardens.

**Exhibiting is fun and engaging.** Novice exhibitors will be especially welcome, and you will have a great day out with fellow enthusiasts. So this year, do get in the spirit and enter some of your blooms of Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias and see what happens! Take a look at the new guide to exhibiting on the RCM website ([www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)). If you still have your copy of the 2013 yearbook, re-read Russell Beeson's article *Showing rhododendrons – an amateur's perspective* (pages 34–37). If you no longer have your copy a pdf of this article is on the website.

Make sure you go around your garden about a week before the Show and note what you think will be in flower. Download your entry forms and Show Schedule from the Group website, fill out the forms and then submit your entry to Georgina Barter so she knows how much space to allocate for each class. But on the day, don't worry if you enter more or different plants, as they can always be squeezed in.

One of the main benefits of the Show will be to present our Group to the public, and to encourage new members to join. Volunteers to man our Group Stand and talk to the public would be really welcome – there's a free Rhododendron to whoever signs up the most new Direct Debits at each Show!

David Millais

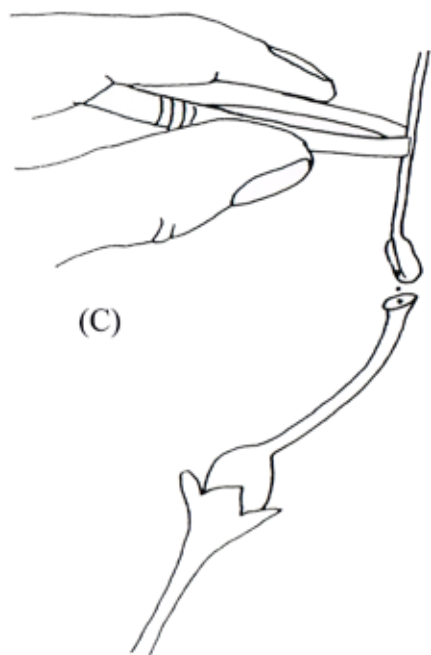
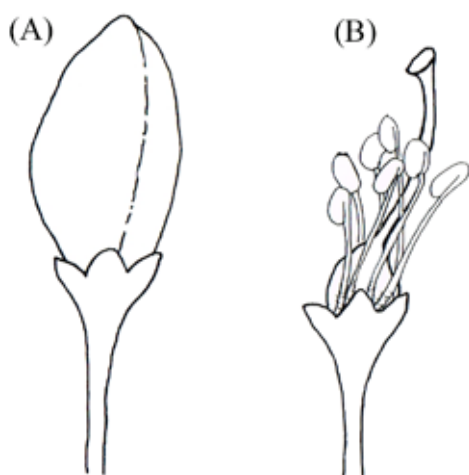
# HOW TO PRODUCE YOUR OWN RHODODENDRON SPECIES SEEDS

Ole Jonny Larsen

**T**his is an introductory guide to an easy way to producing seed from your rhododendrons.

1) Choose your parents. You need to have a) two different clones of a given species or b) two sibling plants from a given species or c) one single plant of the species. Given a choice, the (a) alternative is the best and (c) is the least. The pollen parent flower should be mature enough that the anthers are beginning to exude pollen – look carefully and you will see the grains of pollen held in a sticky thread. The seed bearing (mother) plants must be near to flowering but not in flower.

2) Choose one or more trusses just before they open – the flowers should be in the ‘balloon’ state. (see diagram A). Remove the corollas and the anthers on as many single flowers you as want to pollinate, leaving just the style and stigma (see diagram B). (The corolla must still be completely closed. If the flowers are even a little open, bees can have been there before you. Importantly, bees will not seek a naked style/stigma.) Remove those flowers on the truss that you do not use.



3) Pick one or a few anthers from your chosen pollen parent plant's open flower. The anther must have visible pollen coming out from the top (at least when you are a beginner). If the stigma on your 'mother' plant is sticky, attach pollen to it, covering the surface of the stigma completely with pollen, using the anther as a 'paint brush' (see diagram C). If the stigma is dry, it is not quite mature, so protect it from insects with a paper bag and wait a few days to try again. Repeating the procedure after two days may give a better chance of success.

4) Label the twig with the pollinated stigmas and remember to keep a detailed written record of the cross. Never rely on your memory!

5) If you are lucky, you can harvest your seeds in the autumn when the capsules are brown and almost dry, but try to catch them before they split or seed will be wasted or become contaminated.

6) Put the dry capsules into paper bags or envelopes and allow them to split naturally. Sieve out as much of the chaff as possible and replace seed in small paper or plastic self-seal bags, always remembering to label, label, label!

7) Send your spare seed off to our Seed Convenor:

Mrs Julie Atkinson  
184 Crow Lane East  
Newton-le-Willows  
ST HELENS  
Merseyside  
WA12 9UA

in time for it to be included in the annual Seed Exchange (November/early December).

## Additional notes:

Some growers do not accept this method since the stigma is not covered after the pollen is added. However, this is how Kenneth Cox taught me to do it in 2000, and it has worked for me ever since.

Some rhododendrons will not readily self-pollinate (1c), presumably a natural defence since this is a kind of inbreeding. But if you have only one plant, this is the only option and it is always worth trying. I guess this happens in nature too.

Further Reading

Cox, Peter (1993). *The Cultivation of Rhododendrons*, Batsford

### Spring Tour 2014 – 20th to 23rd May

This is an informal Group tour with participants meeting up in Bremen, having arranged their own transport and accommodation. Judy Hallett and Miranda Gunn will be visiting Hartwig Schepker's collection of hardy hybrids in Bremen Rhododendron Park, the Rhodofest in Westerstede and Walter Schmalscheidt's collection of old English hybrids and they will be pleased to have company.

Please let Judy know on 01981 570401 if you are joining them.

We hope they will provide a report for us when they return!

### Scottish Rhododendron Society tour to Germany

The SRS are organising a longer tour (12 – 19th May) covering some of the same venues. A prospectus and booking form can be obtained from John Hammond, The Three Chimneys, 12 Cockey Moor Road, Starling, Bury BL8 2HB.

The SRS are also arranging garden tours after their Annual Rhododendron Show. The gardens are Kilarden and Linn Botanic Garden, both in the Helensburgh area. For further information and booking contact Gloria Starck, Ordha Coille, Kilberry, Argyll PA29 6YD.

### 70th Jubilee

### New Zealand Rhododendron Association International Rhododendron Conference

20th – 24th October 2014, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Members who have joined the Group tours to New Zealand in the past will have happy memories of the wonderfully flourishing rhododendrons, both hybrids and species, in that country and can recommend this conference wholeheartedly. You will be made very welcome by the warm and friendly New Zealanders and intrigued by all the native plants which dot the landscape. And of course the magnolias and the camellias are also very happy in that climate.

There is a Pre-Conference Tour, 12th – 19th October, which visits all the spectacular sights in NZ that one shouldn't miss – Rotarua, Queenstown, Milford Sound and the rainforest plus all the gardens, both private and public. Ayrilies, Totara Waters, Eden Gardens and the internationally recognised Pukeiti are among the treasures in North Island and the Post-Conference Tour – 25th to 27th October – gives you Mount Cook and the turquoise Lake Tekapo, as well as many of Canterbury's historic gardens.

For the Conference, Dunedin is an ideal centre, with the wonderful Botanic Garden and Larnach Castle Garden, both Gardens of International Significance, along with Tannoch Glen, the garden of the Dunedin Rhododendron Group, to be visited among others during the week.

With Steve Hootman and Hartwig Schepker as the overseas speakers and local celebrity growers as well, this will be a memorable experience and it is well worth looking at the website for the complete programme and to consider whether this should be the year you really must make that long flight. Visit [www.rhododendron.org.nz](http://www.rhododendron.org.nz) just to look at the flowers and see what you think!

### The Early Rosemoor Spring Show March 15th and 16th 2014

Last year's hot summer followed by the disastrously wet but relatively mild winter throughout the south, culminating in a couple of weeks of double-digit temperatures and plentiful sunshine, have produced a welcome pay-off: a vintage display of our three genera this spring.

What a contrast then, the Early Rosemoor Spring Show this year proved to be when compared to last. A devastating frost all but wiped out the magnolias in the southwest in 2013 and the spring came so late that rhododendrons were hard to find for the show bench. Camellias, of course, seem to carry on regardless – no wonder they have such a faithful band of followers, and who can blame them. Thank goodness we were able to muster a fine display of other flowering plants to fill the marquee on that occasion.

No such difficulties for this year's event which brought the RHS Early Camellia Competition to Rosemoor for a second time, accompanied by our own RCM Group SW Branch Early Magnolia and Rhododendron competitions. More, though. With the support of the new Bulb Committee, the RHS decided to stage a Daffodil Competition alongside the camellias and, building on the interest generated by the flowering shrubs displayed in 2013, the SW Branch introduced a Spring Ornamental Plant Competition to the proceedings, using the opportunity to celebrate the memory of our much-missed former Branch Chairman, Alun Edwards, by way of an annual award for the best exhibit in this new event.

The result was a fiesta of spring colour, a perfect launch to the show season, bringing together truly magnificent, 'wow'-inducing magnolias, awesome sprays of species and hybrid rhododendrons, spotless camellias and a splendid display of 'other' plants, all set against a golden staircase of daffodils in sizes ranging from the tiniest species to the impressive cultivated varieties of extravagant colours and proportions.

Exhibitors, societies and trade stands travelled from across the south to participate in the Show and from conversations with the many visitors to the marquee, it was apparent that they too had come from right across the nation to take advantage of the benign weather and early spring flowers. The Show was the 'icing on the cake' for many – all that perfection under one roof was overwhelming.

Capitalising on the proximity of Dartington Glass to RHS Rosemoor, the RHS have instituted an impressive annual award for the Early Camellia Competition which, unlike many awards, the recipient may keep. Trewithen Gardens were the winner, following Marwood Hill Gardens at the inaugural event in 2013. There were some excellent sprays this year, a number of very high quality *Camellia reticulata* blooms and it was good to see the miniature and species classes well supported – they bring so much interest and variety to the bench. Of particular note was an enormous pristine bloom of *C. reticulata* 'Mouchang' and an exquisite *C. pitardii* var. *alba*.

Caerhays Castle Gardens, unable to exhibit magnolias in 2013 because of the frost, commanded the Magnolia Competition



this year, taking the Lamellen Cup, which was kindly donated by Mr and Mrs Jeremy Peter-Hoblyn of Lamellen to be awarded by the SW Branch for the best magnolia exhibit. In this case it was a perfect three vases of magnolias of a highly effective colour combination: *Magnolia* 'Caerhays Belle', *M.* 'Cecil Nice' and *M.* 'Shirazz', the warm rose-pink of the first contrasting with the deep burgundy of the last and sharpened further by the crisp white of the classic *M.* 'Cecil Nice'. We shall wait a long time to see such a display again.



The Early Rosemoor Spring Show 2014

Photo: Sally Hayward

Also of great interest were two varieties brought along by John Gallagher: *Magnolia* 'Theodora', raised by Maurice Foster from his cross of *M.* 'Dark Shadow' and *M. campbellii mollicomata*; and *M.* 'Janet', one of John's hand-pollinated crosses of *M.* 'Pegasus' and *M.* 'Darjeeling'.

In the rhododendron classes, there was much of interest among species and hybrids. Common to both was the satisfaction of seeing perfect blooms with almost no weather damage and every bud fully developed, especially noticeable in the large spray classes. How amazing to see such huge, full sprays in mid-March.



The Tremeer Cup 2014 is awarded to John Lanyon of Tregye by RHS Executive Vice President, Jim Gardiner

Photo: Sally Hayward

The Tremeer Cup recalls the fine garden developed by General Eric Harrison and his wife Mrs Roza Harrison (formerly Roza Stevenson of Tower Court). It was kindly donated to the SW Branch by Lady Vanessa George who now lives at Tremeer where she is enthusiastically restoring the garden and its fine rhododendron collection.

Who better to receive this award than another fine

rhododendron garden being lovingly restored – Tregye, the Cornish garden established by Edward Needham, the enigmatic plant hunter, now in the capable and devoted hands of John Lanyon. Within the collection at Tregye are various examples of *Rhododendron macabeaenum* and it was a stunning truss of the Trengwainton form which took the award.

The Spring Ornamental Plant Competition demonstrated what beauty and variety we have to set our three genera amongst: *Pieris*, *Ribes*, *Illicium*, *Edgeworthia*, *Grevillea*, *Daphne*, *Mahonia*, *Stachyurus*, *Prunus*, *Salix* and on and on, over eighty vases were on display, much to the enjoyment and interest of the public. It was a worthwhile addition to the day and the worthy winner of the Alun Edwards Memorial Cup was Marwood Hill Gardens with a fascinating foursome, which included the striking contrast of the near-black catkins of *Salix melanostachys* with *Ribes* 'White Icicle', voted the best exhibit.

We were so fortunate with the weather this year but transforming a collection of competitions under one roof into a full-blown show needs more than luck, it is the product of imagination, teamwork, sheer effort and an enormous amount of goodwill, strengthened by the unwavering support afforded to the SW Branch from RHS Rosemoor itself. All came together in good measure for this event and hopefully it serves as an example for others to follow in the remaining shows of the year.

The SW Branch would like to extend its appreciation and thanks to Jim Gardiner, Nick Oliver, John Sanders and Jon Webster who judged the branch competitions.

## Ramster Gardens

Open daily 10am – 5pm  
5th March – 15th June

Over 20 acres of woodland garden, developed over the last century. Outstanding displays of camellias, magnolias, azaleas and rhododendrons.



Home of the Group  
collection of Hardy Hybrid  
Rhododendrons



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and magnolias

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Steve Lyus & Graham Mills

This year there was a steady trickle of photos, with a healthy increase in Rhododendron pictures from 23 to 72 (51 species, 21 hybrids). However the number of Magnolias was down again from 13 to just 8; with Camellias also seeing a reduction from 15 to 9.

The 2013 winners are:

### Rhododendrons

Class 1: Rhododendron species:

*R. falconeri* entered by George Hargreaves

Class 2: Rhododendron hybrids:

*R. 'Pink Gin'* entered by Robin Whiting

Class 3: Vireya species:

*R. christiana* entered by George Hargreaves

### Magnolias

*M. 'Darjeeling'* entered by George Hargreaves

### Camellias

*C. 'Dataohong'* (Crimson Robe)  
entered by George Hargreaves

You will note that this year George has almost replicated Russell Beeson's domination by winning all classes bar one!

John McQuire has asked me to say that Russell Beeson with his *R. thayerianum* was a very close runner-up for the Rhododendron Species class.

These winning photographs can now be viewed on the home page of our website.

Now that we have lots more new AGMs, I am hoping that you will all go out this year to search them out so that we can show why they have acquired this accolade.



*Rhododendron falconeri*

Photo : George Hargreaves



*Rhododendron 'Pink Gin'*

Photo: Robin Whiting



*Magnolia campbellii 'Darjeeling'*

Photo: George Hargreaves



*Camellia 'Dataohong' (Crimson Robe)*

Photo: George Hargreaves



*Rhododendron christiana*

Photo: George Hargreaves



### Ledum Astray

A recent television documentary, purporting to establish once and for all the identity of the Yeti, saw its presenter enjoying a series of adventures in the Himalayan mountains and concluding that DNA extracted from the hair of a Yeti was found to be an exact match to that of a species of polar bear that existed forty thousand years ago. In the final moments of the program, we were told that science could not acknowledge that the Yeti was in fact a polar bear because it did not eat fish and did not look like a polar bear!



*Ledum* (or is it *Rhododendron*) *palustre*

Photo: Barry Starling

*Ledum*, as it once was, contained just a few species, all of which I have an admiration for. These sturdy little shrubs come from the most rugged environments often enduring sub-arctic conditions – very low temperatures and constant high winds – where they bravely produce their heads of pure white flowers in profusion. Some years ago, on DNA evidence, it was decided that the genus *Ledum* should be sunk into *Rhododendron* despite the fact that this would make it the only species among a thousand or more others to have five entirely separate petals and the only one to have powdery pollen rather than the typical sticky strands of pollen common to all other rhododendrons.

At the present time botanists and taxonomists appear to have an invincible weapon in their armoury. They utter the initials DNA and all opposition to a name change is expected to be silenced. Somewhere along the line some august body must have devised some rules concerning the percentage of DNA two or more plants should have in common in order to belong to the same species or genus – or is that decision left to the individual botanist or taxonomist? It would be interesting to know on what basis these percentages were chosen. Plants have evolved over millions of years, since long before they had names. We gave them names for our convenience. Certainly it is interesting to know and informative to learn from a plant's DNA its degree of relationship to another plant, but is it really compulsory that this should overturn long established nomenclature? As a simple confused gardener my interpretation is that we could go back to calling *Rhododendron tomentosum* a *ledum* because it does not eat fish and does not look like a *Rhododendron*.

No wonder the Yeti and *Ledum* live in environments remote from most humans!

### Progress report on preservation of *Rhododendron* species and hybrids

The work started by the Group some years ago with the object of preserving *Rhododendron* Species and Hybrids has, in the nature of things, taken time to reach a point where results can be shown, but this time is now approaching.

Included in the first batch of three plants sent to Ros Smith at the Duchy College for micropropagation was material from *Rhododendron* 'Penjerrick' and now a stock of plants is available for planting out next autumn and preparations are being made to do so.

I am informed by Troy Smith, who until recently was Head Gardener at Bodnant, that an avenue of *R. 'Penjerrick'* is to be constructed, from near to Lady Aberconway's seat, planted both sides of the new path, to approximately where the path begins to slope down and curve to the left. Planted about 7–8 metres apart and 4 metres back from the path, with *Rhododendron augustinii* inter-planted (perhaps three between each Penjerrick pair) and lots of scented azaleas of the Mollis type or *R. luteum* planted in front.

The path around which the Avenue is to be planted has already been laid down and the surrounding area cleared of much, including *R. ponticum*, but more has to be done and the soil prepared to receive the plants. The area is not at present open to the public but the intention is, I am told, to open it from 2017 when other work in the vicinity has been completed.

The significance of this lies not only in the addition of a major feature in the Garden at Bodnant but in the cooperation between:-

- Bodnant garden
- Micropropagation Dept. of the Duchy College
- Bodnant Garden Nursery (not NT) who weaned the plants
- The Group, who funded the propagation

Such cooperation is only possible with the goodwill of all concerned and is to be seen more widely between many who are concerned in the preservation of *Rhododendrons*.

John Harsant

### In praise of *Magnolia sprengeri* seedlings.

Although in recent years a majority of new magnolia introductions have been from deliberate controlled crosses, in the past many named cultivars originated from open pollinated seed.

The scores of small black pollen beetles that seem to materialise from nowhere scurried around in unopened flowers and legitimately genetically modified their hosts' progeny to very satisfying effect, producing some excellent hybrids.

The point of this note is to unashamedly encourage Bulletin readers to collect and sow open pollinated seed – and specifically from forms of *Magnolia sprengeri*. The average time to florescence is a bit over 8 years, so even young gentlemen up to the age of seventy could reasonably expect to see the results of their work, as the average life expectation of the British male is currently 78 years. The ladies can enjoy an even greater margin.

For complete hardiness, and above all, clarity and depth of colour, in shades approaching 'true' pink occasionally shaded crimson, with less of the vinous 'blued' pinks of most other species, there is nothing to compare with *Magnolia sprengeri*.



## Confessions of a large leaf lover

Philip Evans

Just consider the quality of the forms and hybrids produced over the years: 'Diva', 'Claret Cup', 'Lanhydrock', 'Eric Savill', 'Copeland Court', 'Marwood Spring', 'Burncoose', 'Wakehurst', 'Westonbirt', to name but nine. Also consider the impressive range of rich colours of trees recently discovered in the wild in China.



Magnolias 'Blood Moon', 'Premier Cru' and 'Claret Cup'

Photo: Maurice Foster

Even crossed with the dominant purple of *Magnolia liliiflora* 'Nigra', *M. sprengeri* hybrids like 'Galaxy', 'Spectrum' and 'Raspberry Swirl' exhibit reddish tones and crossed with *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta*, the clear pink of 'Caerhays Belle' owes much to the *M. sprengeri* pollen.

A reasonable proposition might be that the flower colour of *Magnolia sprengeri* is a dominant character and there is more than a chance that its influence as either a seed or pollen parent is likely to produce flower colour of significant strength and quality. My own brief experience, unscientific, one-off and entirely down to busy pollen beetles, certainly supports that view.

I described in a previous issue a seedling named 'Premier Cru' arising from open pollinated seed taken from *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta* 'Blood Moon'. I planted out only three seedlings. One died and the remaining two, including 'Premier Cru', have now flowered, both of a rich colour which clearly derives from a neighbouring *M. sprengeri* 'Claret Cup', which overlaps in its flowering time. With hindsight it was unfortunate that I used the remaining dozen seedlings as understocks.

The photograph of a vase crammed with flower shows 'Blood Moon' to the left, 'Claret Cup' top right and the hybrid 'Premier Cru' filling the centre. The latter more or less retains the size of 'Blood Moon', with its relatively early flowering but crucially keeps the rich colour of 'Claret Cup', with a pale centre. It has an intermediate shape.

The second unnamed seedling is a darker reddish purple with the spoon shaped tepals forming a large cupped flower more reminiscent of the *M. sprengeri* shape.

Magnolia seed-setting in the UK climate is something of a hit-and-miss affair, and patience and care is needed to make deliberate crosses with no cast iron guarantee of an effective seed set.

However sowing seed from the brightest and best of *M. sprengeri* is to be warmly recommended and seed taken from other, adjacent plants, though more adventurous and speculative, could be worthwhile. If you have space, I would hesitate before using any promising seedlings as understock!

Maurice Foster

I have long been fascinated by the larger leaf rhododendron species with their exotic foliage and eye catching flower trusses. I shall never forget, on my first visit to the Himalayas in 1995, the sight of the forest of *Rhododendron kesangiae* and *R. hodgsonii* on the summit of the Pele La in Bhutan, a blaze of pink and magenta interspersed with the occasional yellow of *R. falconeri*. In subsequent trips came the excitement in NW Yunnan of searching for and finding the elusive *R. protistum*, and in the Tsari Valley of SE Tibet walking through a grove of the rare *R. puderosum*.



*Rhododendron rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*

Photo: Philip Evans

Experience has taught me that seeing these beauties in their pomp in their natural habit is one thing, but cultivating them in one's own garden quite another. It is certainly not an occupation for an impatient temperament. Indeed I have come to the conclusion that two lifetimes (which I am very unlikely to be granted) may be a minimum requirement to see some of my plants reach flowering maturity. In this category I am now inclined to put the following, all are growing in our North Cornwall garden (date of planting in brackets): *Rhododendron falconeri* (1992), *R. hodgsonii* and *R. kesangiae* (1995), *R. arizelum* (1996), *R. basilicum*, *R. grande* and *R. montroseanum* (1999). Seedlings such as *R. protistum*, *R. rex*, *R. sidereum*, *R. galactinum*, *R. praestans* and *R. watsonii*, whilst by now sturdy established plants, have long since been mentally bequeathed to future generations. I have been more fortunate with a seedling *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteum* (1997) flowering since 2010 (see picture) and *R. fulvum* (2005), from seed I collected in Yunnan 1997 and flowering since 2011. Top of the class is *Rhododendron sinogrande* (1991) which commenced flowering exactly twenty years later in 2011. But flowering or not, I cherish them all, and I am sure my failings as a grower may play a part.

*Rhododendron macabeaenum* is well known as 'gardener friendly' and two seedlings I obtained from the Lanhydrock Nursery in 1991 have been flowering reliably now for fourteen years. Three plants I raised myself from seed sown in 1999, grew strongly, were planted out in 2008, and all three budded up in 2012 for the first time. So I can endorse *R. macabeaenum* – its foliage is superb even if the large trusses usually seem to turn out a rather pale yellow. Then, in 1996, I had from the Group seed list, Peter Cox's collection from S Yunnan of a novelty *R. sinofalconeri* (C&H 7183). The plants grew very quickly and two were planted out in 1999, and the largest began flowering ten years later. I rate *Rhododendron sinofalconeri* quite highly. Whilst its foliage is possibly not as classy as its Himalayan relative the flower trusses are impressive and quite a rich yellow. There is a good image on page 143 of the 2012 Yearbook of the truss that won the McClaren Cup at the 2011 Main Rhododendron Competition for Malcolm Pharoah and Marwood Hill Garden.

## GROUP NOTICES

### The Rhododendron Camellia & Magnolia Group Annual General Meeting – Wednesday 28th May 2014

This year we continue our recent policy of holding the AGM at a venue where there is a good garden, having a conducted tour in the morning, lunch and then the AGM at 2.30pm. The Garden which has kindly agreed to host us this May is **Exbury Gardens**.

We meet for coffee at the Entrance at 10.30am, after which John Anderson, the Head Gardener of Exbury, will conduct members around the garden from about 11am. Lunch will be organized for us, (pay on the day) and the AGM will be held at Mr Eddy's, by the Entrance, starting at 2.30. After the meeting there is still likely to be time for a further look at the garden.

Members probably do not need instructions on how to get to Exbury, which is well signposted, but if anyone does need information then consult [www.exbury.co.uk](http://www.exbury.co.uk).

This will be an interesting and enjoyable day and members are warmly encouraged to come and take part. An Agenda for the meeting will be available by email and on the Group website nearer the time.

Please notify the Hon. Secretary, Barry Haseltine [barry.haseltine@which.net](mailto:barry.haseltine@which.net) or 01342 713132 by 22nd May if you plan to attend, stating if you will visit the garden, if you want lunch, or will come to the AGM only.

## BRANCH REPORTS

### South West Branch

We had a very successful Autumn meeting at RHS Garden Rosemoor on October 26th 2013 which was the culmination of a successful year when the South West branch again hosted the Main Rhododendron competition, along with Camellia, Magnolia and Plant Arrangement entries, in April, and, for the first time, the Early Camellia Competition with early Rhododendrons and Magnolias in March. This was such a success, that it will be repeated again next year. We are grateful as ever to the staff at Rosemoor for making us welcome and to our committee and others who work very hard to make these shows a success.

At the Autumn meeting, Colin Brown retired as Chairman of the Branch after seven years of leadership, during a period of change in the RCM group which is still not yet completely resolved. He has left a strong and forward-looking Branch. His place was taken by John Marston, a member of the group for many years and on the Branch Committee, whose special interest is in Magnolias.

We recorded with sadness the recent death of Alun Edwards, a dedicated and active member of our branch. In his memory, we are instituting a cup, the 'Alun Edwards Memorial Cup', which will be presented for the best entry in the Ornamental Plant competition at the Early Spring Show.

We are now looking forward to this early Spring competition at Rosemoor on 15th & 16th of March, where the South West branch will not only be hosting the RHS Early Camellia competition and the branch Rhododendron & Magnolia competitions, but a National Daffodil and bulb competition, as well as our first South West Ornamental Plant competition; a lot to see and admire.

John Marston

### North West Branch

As far as the North West branch is concerned, the only matter of note is that we have been spared the excesses of weather experienced by so many other UK areas. Rainfall, at least near Chester and environs has been normal. Wind damage was limited apart from those coastal zones subject to the gales, spring tides and storm surge. I think our few frosts have been almost entirely grass frosts. The result of this is many Rhododendrons are already in full flower, including *Rhododendron ciliatum* and *R. moupinense*, together with *R. sutchuenense*, *R. uvariifolium* and *R. faucium*. The latter three are usually at least two weeks later. *Magnolia campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata* 'Lanarth' is showing its first flowers, a good two weeks early.

I hope we do not suffer any air frosts in the next couple of weeks and lose the early Magnolia flowers, as we did last year!

Ted Brabin

## MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

We welcome the new members who have joined in the last few months and hope that they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

### UK

Mr Tony Dickerson  
17 Stanley Road, Carshalton Surrey SM5 4LE  
[tonydickerson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:tonydickerson@rhs.org.uk)

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Mr Michael Gottschalk  
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Muhlstr. 7, D-65779 Kelkheim, **Germany**  
[info@lunarplant.de](mailto:info@lunarplant.de)

### USA

Mr Farshad Farshi  
2661 Lacroix Avenue, North Port, Florida 34288-5513 **USA**  
[ffarsh2661@comcast.net](mailto:ffarsh2661@comcast.net)

Gremlins in the electronic system seem to have jinxed the last bulletin and I am therefore reprinting the last set of new members' addresses, with apologies to them all for the confusion:-

Mr Erik Willumsen,  
Herlevsgardsvej 14, 3400 Hillerod, **Denmark**  
[e.willumsen@tdcadsl.dk](mailto:e.willumsen@tdcadsl.dk)

Mr Robert Hatcher  
10 Bogaduck Road, Aldgate, S. Australia 5154 **Australia**  
[hatcherhouse@internode.on.net](mailto:hatcherhouse@internode.on.net)

Miss Anne Guelker,  
RR1, Box 1771, Winona, Missouri 65588 **USA**  
[ozarkslandscaper@live.com](mailto:ozarkslandscaper@live.com)

Mr Gregory Peterson,  
9252 7th Avenue NW, Seattle, Washington 98117 **USA**  
[gregoryp@earthlink.net](mailto:gregoryp@earthlink.net)



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*Back issues of the yearbook from 1946, and previously advertised titles not featured here may still be available – please enquire.*

### MAGNOLIAS IN ART & CULTIVATION

**Barbara Oozeerally, Jim Gardiner & Stephen Sponberg** 268pp Kew, 2014

150 full colour botanical paintings, cultivation notes and detailed botanical descriptions

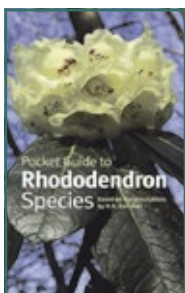
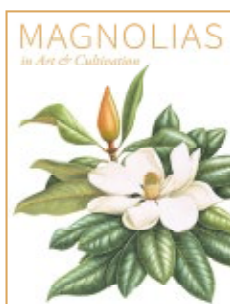
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### Pocket Guide to RHODODENDRON SPECIES

**John McQuire & Mike Robinson**

704pp Kew, 2009

Full Price: **£59** Member's Price: **£42**

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# PUBLICATIONS

03/14

# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group forthcoming events



APRIL / 2014

12/13

**South East Branch/RHS**  
RHS Wisley

**Early Rhododendron Competition**

**Main Camellia Competition**

**Spring Ornamental Plant Competition**

incorporating South East Branch Magnolia Competition

Barry Haseltine  
barry.haseltine@which.net  
or 01342 713 132  
Georgina Barter  
georginac@rhs.org.uk  
or 020 7821 3142



26/27

**South West Branch/RHS**  
RHS Rosemoor

**Main Rhododendron Competition** with South West Branch Camellia, Rhododendron & Floral Display Competitions

Dr John Marston  
artavianjohn@gmail.com  
or 01271 323 202

Georgina Barter  
georginac@rhs.org.uk  
or 020 7821 3142

MAY / 2014

28-2 MAY

**North West Branch**  
North West Scotland

Spring Tour to Highland and Island gardens, West Coast Scotland

Ted Brabin  
angela.brabin@btinternet.com  
or 0151 353 1193

30

**New Forest Branch**  
Minterne House

Garden visit  
Martin Gates  
02380 252 843  
mgates@talktalk.net



7

**South West Branch**  
Exeter University/Killerton

Garden visits to Exeter University Campus and Killerton Gardens  
Full day visit

Dr John Marston  
artavianjohn@gmail.com  
or 01271 323 202



10

**South East Branch/RHS**  
Storrington

Pinecroft and The McLaren Garden visits

Barry Haseltine  
barry.haseltine@which.net  
or 01342 713 132

10/11

**North West Branch**  
Ness Gardens

North West Branch Show  
Ted Brabin  
angela.brabin@btinternet.com  
or 0151 353 1193

10/11

**RHS Harlow Carr**

**Rhododendron Competition**

Georgina Barter  
georginac@rhs.org.uk  
or 020 7821 3142

14

**New Forest Branch**  
Millais Nurseries and Richard Thornton's Gardens

Garden visits  
Martin Gates  
02380 252 843  
mgates@talktalk.net

18

**Wessex Branch**  
Ramster

Wessex Branch Show  
Miranda Gunn  
miranda@ramstergardens.com  
or 01428 644 422

20/23

**RC&M Group**  
North Germany

Informal Group  
Tour to Bremen  
North Germany

Judith Hallett  
judyhallett@googlemail.com  
or 01981 570 401

28

**RC&M Group**

Group AGM at Exbury Gardens

Barry Haseltine  
barry.haseltine@which.net  
or 01342 713 132

JUNE / 2014

3

**South West Branch**  
Trelissick

All day visit

Dr John Marston  
artavianjohn@gmail.com  
or 01271 323 202



11

**New Forest Branch**  
Melbury House

Garden visit

Martin Gates  
02380 252 843  
mgates@talktalk.net

OCTOBER / 2014

25

**South West Branch**  
RHS Rosemoor

Autumn meeting

Dr John Marston  
artavianjohn@gmail.com  
or 01271 323 202

