

# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 133 / August 2020 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTE

As always at this time of year *Rhododendron* 'Polar Bear' is in flower along with a few other later rhododendrons here in my garden in Cornwall. *Magnolia x wieseneri*, *M. delavayi* and *M. grandiflora* are producing intermittent flowers. My *M. x wieseneri* is close to the front door and the scent hits you as soon as you go outside.

Overall it seems to have been a peculiar season and not a very good one so far. Wind and rain came when the magnolias began flowering followed by alternating very dry and very wet spells thereafter. Perhaps it is an indication of my advancing age and I just remember seeing previous years through rose-tinted spectacles.

## Annual General Meeting

We had to cancel the planned AGM and the committee are currently considering whether we might have a meeting later in the year or an electronic 'virtual' meeting or just wait until next year. At the meeting we would have formally presented the Accounts for the last financial year, the Trustees' Report and the Independent Examiner's Report. These can all be seen on our web-site at [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/aggm](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/aggm).

Lacking a meeting to formally make changes to the committee we have co-opted Mary White as the new Yearbook Lead Editor. At the current time there are no other committee changes.

If anyone has any queries, requests or suggestions that they would have raised at the AGM then please send them to me so that we can respond.

## Centenary Cup Photographic Competition

Lacking most of the shows this year we instead mounted a virtual Centenary Cup Competition. This was admirably organised by Barry Cooke and a band of volunteers who devoted many hours of work to the event. He has not said but I suspect that Barry was surprised by the number of members submitting photographs and the sheer quantity of those photographs. You will find full details of the competition and the resultant winners later in this Bulletin.

## Other Internet activities

A number of members have been taking photographs and videos of their gardens and posting them on Social Media. You will have



*Rhododendron* 'Roza Stevenson' (See Andy Fly's choice of yellow elepidote hybrids on pages 13-14). Photo: Andy Fly

received emails about some of these but others will have passed you by unless you have registered with our various accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram which I encourage you to do.

Mark Bobin provides more information on what has been happening later in this issue.

*The winner of the Centenary Cup and all the winners of the Centenary Cup Photo Competition are announced on pp2-4*

## Volunteers

As I indicated in a previous Bulletin, Jenny Fly will be stepping down as Treasurer next year, after many years' dedicated service. I am pleased to say that we have a replacement in the form of Simon Toms who is slowly being introduced to our accounts process and will take over in 2021.

Graham Mills  
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[chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org)

## The Centenary Cup Flower Show 2020...

It was March 2020, the arrangements were in full swing, coordinated by Wessex Branch Chairman, Andy Fly and his committee; from trestle tables and banners to a Hog Roast, with a visit due from Hartwig Schepker and the German Rhododendron Society at the end of the day. Hartwig was going to present the Show winner with the Centenary Cup. The planned Centenary Cup Flower Show at Ramster, the AGM at Bowood and the visit to Deer Dell to name but a few, all had to be cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control. We only had the Early Rosemoor Show in 2020. We could not let this stop absolutely everything and agreed to have a 'virtual' flower show, hence:

## ...the Centenary Cup Photo Competition 2020

The competition was conceived as a means to unite, entertain and help members in what was potentially a long period of isolation and possible loneliness. Judging by the correspondence received, we succeeded! There were two additional benefits: flowers which would have been long gone or not yet opened were eligible, as entries were to be from the start of the year to the end of June. Secondly, we would also have a collection of photographs for the website. The team of organisers was assembled but little did they realise what a terrific response there would be!

Stephen Lyus, Alice Bray, Pam Hayward and I set to work. Firstly, the entries went to Alice to resize and name the photographs for Stephen to upload to the website; a time consuming task for both of them. The entries also came to me which I then acknowledged and compiled into a database of all entries with classes, entrant names and photographs, as a reference.

All photographs had to be anonymous on the website as the judges would be selecting from there. Pam was our Show Steward to ensure all names were correct and entries were in the right class. By the close, there were 48 entrants and 1009 photographs from Canada, America, Australia, Italy, Sweden, Eire and the UK!

Fortunately, seven people who were not going to enter the Competition, volunteered to judge a Class each. Once the Class results were received, the same seven judges were asked to judge the Class winners against each other, giving the overall winner for the Centenary Cup 2020. The results from the seven Classes are:

### Class 7: A magnolia species or hybrid, bloom or spray:

1st place: *M. 'Caerhays Surprise'* AGM, Pat Bucknell

2nd place: *M. x wieseneri*, Pat Bucknell

3rd place: *M. martinii*, John Marston

Highly Commended: *M. liliiflora* 'Nigra' AGM, Ivor Stokes

Commended: *M. campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata* 'Lanarth', Henny & Peter Shotter



Class 7 Winner: *Magnolia* 'Caerhays Surprise' Photo: Pat Bucknell

### Class 6: A camellia, species or hybrid, bloom or spray:

1st place: *C. japonica* 'Royal Velvet', Jim Stephens

2nd place: *C. x williamsii* 'Debbie' AGM, Jim Stephens

3rd place: *C. 'Dr Clifford Parks'* AGM, Caroline Bell

Highly Commended: *C. japonica* 'San Dimas' AGM, Stephen Lyus

Commended: *C. japonica* 'Black Lace' AGM, Polly Cooke



Class 6 Winner: *Camellia japonica* 'Royal Velvet'. Photo: Jim Stephens

### Class 5: An evergreen azalea, species or hybrid, spray:

1st place: *R. 'Azuma-kagami'* (Wilson 16) AM, Pat Bucknell

2nd place: *R. x mucronatum* 'Lilacinum', Ivor Stokes

3rd place: Unknown, Pat Bucknell



Highly Commended: *R. 'Artistic Meg'*, Rosemary Legrand

Commended: *R. 'Dayspring'*, Polly Cooke



Class 5 Winner: *Rhododendron 'Azuma-kagami'* Photo: Pat Bucknell

**Class 4: A deciduous azalea, species or hybrid, spray:**

1st place: *R. 'Piccolo'*, Polly Cooke

2nd place: *R. 'Freya'*, Mark Oddy

3rd place: *R. 'Puddington'*, Ted Brabin

Highly Commended: *R. 'Il Tasso'* (Nymans Form), Polly Cooke

Commended: *R. 'Nicholas de Rothschild'*, Seamus O'Brien



Class 4 Winner: *Rhododendron 'Piccolo'* Photo: Polly Cooke

**Class 3: A tender species or hybrid rhododendron, grown under glass or otherwise, including vireyas, truss or spray:**

1st Place: *R. 'Ava'* (vireya), Roy Bilbie

2nd Place: *R. 'Kisses'* (vireya), Roy Bilbie

3rd Place: *R. laetum* (vireya), Andy & Jenny Fly

Highly Commended: *R. 'Neesa'* (vireya), Roy Bilbie

Commended: *R. xanthostephanum*, Andy & Jenny Fly



Class 3 Winner: *Rhododendron 'Ava'* Photo: Roy Bilbie

**Class 1: A hardy species rhododendron, truss or spray:**

1st place: *R. annae*, Myra Usher

2nd place: *R. campylogynum* Myrtilloides Group AGM, Seamus O'Brien

3rd place: *R. hookeri*, Seamus O'Brien

Highly Commended: *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteum* AGM, Glynne Jones

Commended: *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *xanthocodon*, Andy & Jenny Fly



Class 1 Winner: *Rhododendron annae*. Photo: Myra Usher.



## WINNER OF THE 2020 CENTENARY CUP



### **Class 2 & Centenary Cup Photo Competition Winner**

*Rhododendron 'Queen of Hearts' FCC*

Photo: AJ Fly

#### **Class 2: A hardy hybrid rhododendron, truss or spray:**

1st place: R. 'Queen of Hearts' FCC, Andy & Jenny Fly

2nd place: R. 'Pink Gin', Andy & Jenny Fly

3rd place: R. 'John Henry Agnew', Sarah Bray

Highly Commended: R. 'Sappho' AM, Val Hoppichler

Commended: R. 'Boddaertianum' AM, Alan Pedrick

***Congratulations to Andy & Jenny Fly  
for the photo of  
Rhododendron 'Queen of Hearts',  
you have won  
the Centenary Cup with this entry.***

That's all folks! I hope this has provided some light relief and entertainment to you all during these difficult times. My thanks to all who helped, judged, entered and just generally enjoyed this competition. There will be more details and photos from the Competition in the 2021 Yearbook.

*Barry Cooke, Vice Chairman*

[bj.cooke@btinternet.com](mailto:bj.cooke@btinternet.com)



The Centenary Cup Photo: Sally Hayward

## Presentation of the A J Waley Medal

With shows being cancelled, we haven't just missed out on seeing the wonderful competition entries, the awards presented to winners and experiencing the terrific camaraderie that accompanies our events; we have also missed the presentations to the winners of the RHS/RCMG Awards for 2019. The only award that is kept by the winner is the A J Waley Medal, so it seemed fitting to ask the RHS if it could be sent, so that a 'presentation' with appropriate social distancing could be arranged.



The inscription reads: A J WALEY MEDAL To Mr J Inskip for his work in the cultivation of rhododendrons 2019. SCANS: Barry Cooke.

The 2019 winner of the A J Waley Medal is Jim Inskip, for his work with deciduous azaleas. Conveniently, Jim lives a mile or two from us. So, by appointment, Barry took the medal to Jim's house and 'presented' it to Jim. There are no photos, as Jim is a bit camera shy at the best of times! Barry did do a photo scan of both sides of it before the presentation which Jim was aware of. Jim thought that most of you won't know what the medal really looks like, and suggested that pictures of the medal were published for you all to see, instead of a photo of him. Many congratulations, Jim, from the whole Group.

Jim asked us to convey his thanks and appreciation to all involved with the award of the A J Waley Medal to him. He is, quite rightly, very proud and pleased to receive it. Many thanks to RHS Head of Horticultural Relations, Chris Moncrieff, and his team of helpers who were determined to help us and finally the medal arrived to enable this presentation. Perhaps when things get back to normal and we can all meet up again, we will do a more formal presentation and photos of Jim with the medal. In the meantime enjoy your award, Jim.

Polly & Barry Cooke

## SOCIAL MEDIA OFFICER'S REPORT

The RCM Group's social media have been very busy during the last few months, not only because of the extremely floriferous season but also we've had to show our plants to each other virtually. There's been a huge effort to lift everyone's spirits in recent times by sending in pictures and videos from all over the world. This has brought a lot of joy to our group's

members but also, from this, new connections, new ideas, new plants and new relations have been achieved.

The RCM Group Facebook forum has been growing, with a huge range of pictures, ideas, thoughts and research coming through. Some special mentions have to go to Colin Mugridge for his article on 'Growing rhododendrons on alkaline soil' and also Everard Daniel for his information on Loderi hybrids, which were both displayed on the Facebook forum and the RCM Group Facebook page. Also a special mention to Gary Long, Head Gardener at Trewithen Gardens for his 'Daily Commute to work' pictures on Instagram and Twitter and also a big thank you to everyone who has sent in content for the Group.

Keep sending in your superb content of our three genera. It can be pictures of special plants, facts about your home-made compost or even information on the project that you have going on, I would love to hear from you. Send to the Group's social media or email [communications@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:communications@rhodogroup-rhs.org)

If you haven't already, please do join us on Twitter (@RCM\_Group), Instagram (rcm\_group), Facebook (Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group) and the Facebook forum (Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group Forum) to bring our community even closer.

Mark Bobin

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of the RCMG Bulletin contains an expanded section of Members' Notes and I hope you will enjoy reading these. The Covid-19 pandemic has prevented the usual spring and summer activities of the RCMG and reports of these would otherwise form the bulk of this summer edition.

Copy date for the next Bulletin is Friday 30th October and more notes from members will be very welcome.

My contact details are on p.131 of this year's Yearbook. Have you made any discoveries in your garden during 'lockdown'? I have found a plant of *Rhododendron tephropeplum* still no larger than when heeled in ten years ago and now nearly suffocated by Lenten lilies. I will move it to a more favourable site for some TLC.

I regret that some mistakes crept into the last Bulletin and they were my fault entirely. On p.7 the caption to the photo of the Indian gate lodge should have read: The Indian gate lodge at the entrance to Dromana House. I hope the owners of Dromana House will accept my apology for this. On p.8 the caption to the middle photo in the left column should have read: HRH the Prince of Wales with Seamus at NBG Kilmacurragh, passing *Rhododendron* 'Blandyanum'. The photo of the 18th c. pond vista at NBG Kilmacurragh should have been credited to Mary O'Neill Maloney and the photo of Paddy Mackie standing beside *Rhododendron sinogrande* at Mahee should be credited to Seamus O'Neill.

Peter Furneaux  
[peterfurneaux@googlemail.com](mailto:peterfurneaux@googlemail.com)



In the August 2019 Bulletin I reported that, following the experience of the first two applications to the Outstanding Garden Scheme, we would be making some improvements to the scheme, and that in the meantime we would not be taking further applications. I am delighted to report that we have completed those changes and, by the time you read this, the revised Outstanding Garden Scheme should be live on the website and open for new applications.

We have reorganised and reworded a few of the criteria, making expectations more realistic in some cases, for example labelling. We have also created a more complete guide for applicants, so that they can understand what is expected of them for each criterion. The new application template is also more specific about what should be included in the application.

Assessment against the criteria will inherently be somewhat subjective, so we have made some changes that aim to ensure as much consistency as possible between one assessment and the next. We have created a guide for assessors to provide much clearer guidelines for judging each criterion. Alongside that we have created a more robust process for the assessment itself, whereby strengths in some areas can be used to offset weaknesses in other areas, while maintaining an overall high standard for qualifying for Outstanding Garden status.

We are now looking forward to more applications from gardens. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me (p.131 of this year's Yearbook).

Nick Butler

## BRANCH REPORTS

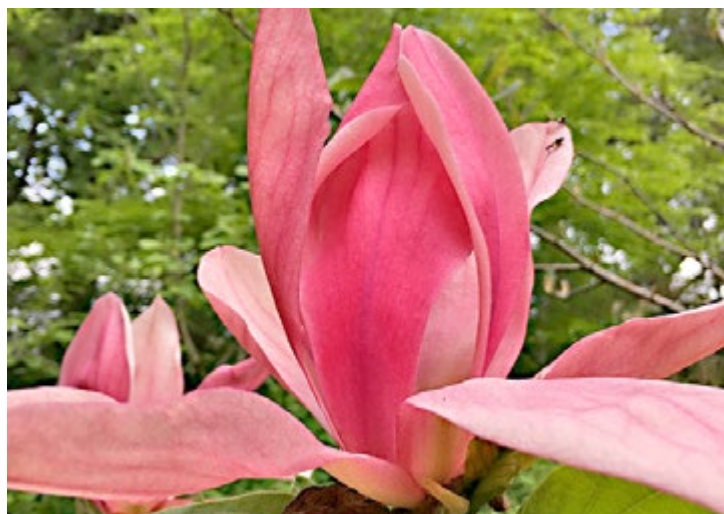
### West Midlands Branch

#### Magnolias at Hodnet Hall ... an update.

Some few years ago I wrote an article for the Bulletin about the magnolias that were planted at Hodnet Hall, a garden in north Shropshire. This was for two reasons, firstly as a way of introducing myself as a fairly recent member. Secondly because we were on the cusp of expanding the collection and it seemed good to set something down before we moved tentatively forward. The spur towards expansion was the creation of Cherry Tree Arboretum and nursery by former owner of Bridgemere, John Ravenscroft which brought a huge number of varieties to the market, something which is sure to increase now that the business has been taken over by F.P. Matthews. Greater availability of varieties such as 'Ian's Red' or 'Genie' should give the everyday customer or owner of the average sized garden more to choose to embrace.

This year, 2020, was not a particularly vintage year for flowering but some old standards such as 'Alba Superba' did well as they always do and there was good extension growth due to the rainfall

the previous summer. 'Leda' which is still probably the best white in my humble opinion got a little spoilt by rain and the blooms became spotted with brown before it reached its peak, something that is always a risk with white flowers. The ubiquity of 'Black Tulip' does offer a cautionary tale of the power of a catchy name. The flower is excellent in the landscape when planted alongside whites and pinks; we have it alongside 'Merrill' and 'Leonard Messel' where we can make the most of the contrast in colour and flower forms. However, the more I see of it out of flower the more I think that it makes a scrappy, untidy looking tree. Amongst the other *Magnolia x loebneri* varieties that we grow, 'Wildcat' continues to impress. The pompom like flowers really look at you and seem happy in inclement weather, and resist being knocked about by the wind. As a garden which opens to the public, we try to cover as much of the season as possible although one trend that has been noticeable over the last few years is that the worst weather seems to come in the middle. We have had a run of excellent March and April displays from early flowerers such as *M. campbellii*, and *M. 'Charles Raffill'* keeps getting better and better. Equally, the later flowering magnolias have done increasingly well. For me the two stand out plants of the 2020 season were 'Daybreak' and 'Susanna Van Veen'. The latter shows its parentage (*M. sargentiana* var. *robusta*) in the sheer voluptuousness of the enormous flowers with huge furry buds revealing deep pink tepals that flop a little; the star quality however is a glorious scent. Fortunately, ours is a young tree so the flowers are at a height to be sniffed! *M. x brooklynensis* 'Daybreak' is a simply outstanding tree.



*M. x brooklynensis* 'Daybreak' Photo: Ross Underwood

Ours have already acquired a pyramidal shape and the flowers are elegant and remind me of candles on a chandelier. They are deep pink outside and lighter pink within, and lightly scented. This is a far superior tree to 'Woodsmen', which I always find to be a rather muddy purple, and deserves to be more widely planted, especially in urban and suburban areas. It is nice to be able to push the flowering season further on as a means of keeping our visitors engaged with the garden. *Magnolia acuminata* blood helps in this respect and we shall be looking for more in this vein, though I have not yet encountered 'Banana Split' and any recommendations would be welcome! In terms of the summer flowering magnolias the pride of our collection (and my own favourite) is *M. obovata* of which we have two large trees.

Elsewhere we have *M. wilsonii* which, as I write, has finished flowering, to be succeeded by *M. sieboldii*. We don't yet have any cultivars of the latter but plans are in the pipeline because we will be clearing an area of reverted *Rhododendron* 'Cunningham's White' which was planted as a windbreak adjacent to our water gardens. This area has predominantly lain undisturbed so has built up a good 'woody' soil and is beneath oaks. We have taken advantage of the 'lockdown' period putting in some irrigation to the area. One small advantage of being closed has been the opportunity to make a mess away from the public gaze. *Magnolia macrophylla* should also flourish here and we have several others around the garden. *Magnolia x wieseneri* 'Aashild Kalleberg' was planted 5 years ago and is busy making a small tree. Despite some exposure it has been unaffected by the strong winds in both summer and winter and blooms well. It is rapidly becoming one of my favourites. I hope that this article has given some flavour of what we are trying to develop at Hodnet, though we are not aiming for a stamp collector's garden. Hopefully we can continue to integrate members of this superb genus into the surrounding landscape as the garden develops and most of all continue having fun!

Ross Underwood

West Midlands Branch Chairman

## Ireland Branch

### Expansion plans for the National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh

The historic estate at Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow was reunited earlier this year when the National Historic Properties division of the Office of Public Works (who own the gardens) purchased the Regency era walled garden, the early 18th century Deer Park, woodlands, avenues and fields beyond.

The purchases more than double the existing area open to the public and plans are now afoot to restore and re-develop these. This includes extending the existing rhododendron-lined Broad Walk into the adjacent fields which will further allow expansion of the *Rhododendron*, *Camellia* and particularly, the *Magnolia* collection and the creation of new formal garden areas.

The Deer Park, which contains the burial place of Thomas and Janet Acton (the 19th century garden creators) will be restored as a Repton-style landscape park. It is planned to re-open the vista to the great lime allées in the Deer Park that were once aligned to the vista leading from the drawing room of Kilmacurragh House, through the garden and across the pond. This area also contains a ring fort, ancient oaks and a tract of primeval woodland that will be subject to a sensitive restoration. The entire area is surrounded by an extensive system of ha-has.

Kilmacurragh is an outstation of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin in Dublin.

Seamus O'Brien

Ireland Branch Chairman

## What is it, then?



Photo: Angela Brabin

Wandering round the garden last autumn I noticed four or five large growths, all on *Camellia japonica* 'Adolphe Audusson', a large specimen about 10 feet high and wide. Examining these structures closely they were a pale green, firm but of a spongy nature. On slicing them into pieces I could find no obvious sign of animal infestation. I sent photos to two of our most learned camellia growers and they forwarded details to another "wise one". Their conclusion, which concurred with mine, was that they were made by a camellia gall midge, or something very similar. After removal they were placed in our non-recyclable waste bin!

This year, in early June, I found another specimen and despite close examination I could see no more on any of the camellias and I do have a good few. As last year, it was again on 'Adolphe Audusson'. The photo shows it forms by or in a flower – a few deformed red petals being visible. Prior to last year's sightings I have never seen these things before and wonder whether others have found them.

Ted Brabin

North Wales and Northwest Branch Chairman

## MEMBERS' NOTES

### Étienne Soulange-Bodin (1774 – 1845) and his *Magnolia* hybrid – 200 years on

It is 200 years since Étienne Soulange-Bodin, cavalry officer, doctor, botanist and horticulturist had the idea of crossing *Magnolia denudata* (then *M. yulan*) with the pollen of *Magnolia liliiflora* (then *M. purpurea* or *discolor*) in 1820. This was not the first known *Magnolia* hybrid, which honour falls to *Magnolia x thompsoniana* discovered in 1808 in a batch of *Magnolia virginiana* seedlings by nurseryman Archibald Thomson (note original spelling) in the Mile End Nursery of Thomson and Gordon, London. However, Thomson's discovery was a chance hybrid, whereas Soulange-Bodin made a deliberate cross, so probably deserves more credit. Soulange-Bodin as a young man studied medicine and botany (then still closely allied) joined Napoleon's army and travelled across Europe and Russia, taking special interest in the plants he came across on his journeys. He also had a variety of jobs: administrative in Paris,

Continued overleaf



Secretary at the French Embassy in Constantinople, and garden manager of Empress Josephine's garden at Malmaison. He was advisor to Prince Eugène de Beauharnais, stepson of Napoleon, Viceroy of Italy and accompanied him on various campaigns, and married the daughter of Empress Josephine's lawyer, a M. Calmelet. Napoleon conferred upon him the Cross of the Légion d'honneur and the Iron Cross, but on Napoleon's first exile in 1814, he retired to his father-in-law's Chateau de Fromont on the Seine near Paris with 70 hectares of land, which he proceeded to turn into a large plant nursery and botanical garden. He joined the Linnaean Society of Paris and was its President in 1826 when the first flowers appeared on his hybrid magnolia. In the *Proceedings of the Society* in that year, there was a detailed description (running to four pages) of the new magnolia hybrid which caused much excitement with its large flowers of white and purple, precociously covering the tree. In the *Proceedings*, describing a Fête Champêtre of 24th May 1826 in honour of Linnaeus' birth date, it was the unanimous decision of the members to name the new hybrid after their President: Magnolia Soulangiana. John Claudius Loudon in his *Gardener's Magazine* Vol. 9 of 1833 gives a description of Fromont: 'M. Soulange-Bodin combines at Fromont an elegant villa residence with an exotic nursery and an institution for young horticulturists. Like Vilmorin he is at once a skilful cultivator, a seedsman, a scholar and a gentleman. On his retirement to Fromont, in 1814, he commenced laying it out in the English manner, and so as to combine the picturesque scenery of the park with the profitable culture of the nursery. The grounds exceed a hundred acres of a surface gently varied, and sloping to the Seine.' Soulange-Bodin's hybrid soon gained international recognition thanks to Messrs Young, nurserymen in Epsom, Surrey who bought his entire stock of the magnolia for the vast sum of 500 guineas in 1829 and distributed it to customers, willing to pay large sums for novelty. It reached America in 1832 and the nursery trade around the world thereafter. Many further hybrids of the same cross have been produced since then (in fact, over a hundred) and it must be the most popular magnolia grown in the temperate world. Strange to think that this French horticulturist, although renowned in France during his lifetime could so easily have been consigned to footnotes in botanical histories were it not for the fame of the hybrid magnolia which bears his name and is still planted extensively 200 years later.

John Marston

Southwest Branch Chairman

## Rhododendrons that glow

Most gardeners would probably agree that some flowers seem to have an inner glow – a character that may be difficult to define and difficult to explain. This is certainly true of rhododendrons. Is it the result of the structure of cells on the surface of the petals, or the effect of light at certain times of day (perhaps the UV level, that enables insects to see patterns invisible to the human eye)? Is it simply the intensity of colour or the overlaying or mingling of colours? (These are topics discussed in the scientific literature, as for example in an article by R.L. Antoniou Kourounioti and others entitled 'Buckling as an origin of ordered cuticular patterns'! (*Journal of the Royal Society Interface* vol. 10 Issue 80, 6 March 2013). Certainly, it is a quality that seems most apparent in hybrid rhododendrons rather than the species, though some species do exhibit it. I suspect that the main contributing factor probably is the mingling of hues as a result of hybridisation. The word 'glow' we associate with the red or orange of fire, but a similar effect occurs among pale-coloured rhododendrons and is perhaps better termed 'radiance'.

I am now going to risk, however subjective this may be considered, the naming of some of the many rhododendrons which seem to me to have this glow. 'Earl of Donoughmore' is very high on my list, and here certainly a subtle merging of different shades of red seems responsible. Another very different example is 'Contina', where the reddish violet and the blue of its parents, *R. concinnum* 'Chief Paulina' and *R. augustinii* 'Barto Blue' combine to produce a most brilliant glow.

The glow in so many varieties seems to derive from the vermilion of *R. griersonianum*, a unique colour which gives its special quality to its hybrids, especially apparent in 'Fabia's vibrant red *R. yakushmanum* descendant 'Dopey', and richly endowing the splendid Rothschild hybrid 'Fairylight' ('Lady Mar' x *R. griersonianum*) with a magical salmon glow. 'Olga' is a most impressively glowing merger of yellow, pink and orange. 'May Day' mingles the red of *R. haematodes* with *R. griersonianum* to produce a bright deep vermilion. The influence of *R. griersonianum* is similarly seen in the glowing pink of some *R. williamsianum* hybrids such as 'Jock' and 'Winsome'.



## The Rhododendron & Azalea Centre

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*Rhododendron* 'Olga' Photo: Brian Holt

Early in the year the sharp pink of 'Boskoop Ostara', a fine hybrid of *R. mucronulatum*, probably better than the more often seen 'Cornell Pink', has perhaps less of a glow and more of a bright gleam lighting up the late winter landscape. Among the many paler 'radiant' varieties I would mention *R. augustinii* ssp. *hardyi*, which certainly (to judge by the specimen on Wisley's Battleston Hill) is not the radiant pure white one first assumes. Closer inspection, in the right light, reveals the faintest hint of ethereal powder blue. Other pale contenders are 'Susan', that lilac-blue hybrid of *R. campanulatum*, the slightly deeper 'Everestianum' and, among the *R. yakushimanum* hybrids, 'Silberwolke' and 'Pink Cherub'. The evergreen azaleas can also glow; 'Beethoven' is outstanding for its distinctive blend of violet and rose, especially vivid in the evening light. There are also several fine glowing pinks among the azaleas, such as 'Willy' and 'Ivette'. For the evergreen azaleas *R. kaempferi* often plays the rôle which *R. griersonianum* plays among the elepidotes. How very personal, however, my selections are! Readers will no doubt have many other candidates in mind and, I imagine, some interesting alternative observations on this theme. Of course, why haven't I mentioned 'Naomi Glow'? (Because her glow is not the most intense.) And do her siblings 'Nautilus' and 'Stella Maris' have less of a glow?

Brian Holt

### ***Rhododendron schlippenbachii*, The Royal Azalea**

**A**lthough my favourite rhododendron is usually one that is in flower when the question arises, if pressed I think I would plump for the Royal Azalea *R. schlippenbachii* to reign supreme. This choice is endorsed by many rhododendron enthusiasts who took part in Sally Hayward's poll of the 100 favourites in 2015 when *R. schlippenbachii* came 12th among all the candy floss and lollipop species and hybrids.

This rhododendron was discovered on the Korean Islands in 1854 by Baron von Schlippenbach and then later by Richard Oldham on an expedition for Kew, but it was not until 1918 when Wilson sent back a good quantity of seed that the species became firmly established in cultivation. The best specimen I have ever

encountered was growing against the house at Chyverton, garden of the late Nigel Holman in mild Cornwall. However, I also recall being shown a group of *R. schlippenbachii* in a public open space in the town of St. John's, Newfoundland. These shrubs were massed with flowers in early June after the long, cold winter had given way to spring. Clearly this rhododendron can take temperatures lower than any likely to be experienced in Great Britain while winter dormant, though new growth is vulnerable to spring frosts.



*Rhododendron schlippenbachii* Photos: Barry Starling

*R. schlippenbachii* was given an Award of Merit in 1896 to a form with soft pink flowers shown by Veitch and Sons but it was not until 1944 that a deeper pink variant exhibited by Lord Aberconway received a First Class Certificate, and then in 1965 another clone named by Sir Giles Loder 'Prince Charming' was also awarded an FCC. Perhaps its greatest accolade is the Award of Garden Merit received in 1963. The colour range of the Royal Azalea is from a rare white, then the lightest of pinks through to a deep rose sometimes accompanied by red spotting.

In the late 1960s I obtained seed labelled '*R. schlippenbachii*, dwarf form' and in communication with Koichiro Wada enquired as to what he could tell me about a dwarf form of the species. "Yes" he replied, "there is a dwarf form, it only reaches 2m. in height"! Since I had never seen even a mature plant of that stature this was a surprise. Nevertheless, I grew the seed and one of the seedlings is in my present garden at no more than 1 metre in height after fifty years.

*Continued overleaf*

Like some other deciduous azalea species, the leaves of seedlings are beloved of gastropods so that when growing from seed, which is the best method of propagation, special protection should be afforded for the first two or three years. Open pollinated seed can be sown with a confidence that it will come true as this species is not known to cross with any other.

Barry Starling

## Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

### Taking Conservation of Rhododendrons Forward in a Wide-ranging, Bio-secure and Practical Way

In the fourteen years since the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group [RSCG] was inaugurated it has made major progress in tackling several wide-ranging projects, in accordance with its aims and objectives, as were outlined in the July 2012 issue of the Bulletin, and the Editor has requested an update on our activities.

The Group is involved practically in the surveying of important rhododendron gardens and establishing database records for these gardens, is also actively taking forward a number of projects in the field, as well as continuing to organise a major two-day conference each Spring and Autumn, with a range of key speakers and garden visits, as explained in the original article referred to above.

The Group is gradually moving forward with arranging to survey its list of 100 gardens in Scotland that are known to have contained a significant collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, and have also worked in several large estates in Northern England. Some gardens we have visited to carry out a provisional survey result in confirming the owner has lost a substantial part of their collection over a long number of years; equally, the Group is still finding, or becoming aware of, 'Lost gardens' that contain a significant collection of both species and hybrids, so the overall number of gardens of interest remains at 100, or thereabouts. Our garden surveys have a much wider purpose than just identifying, labelling, and recording on a database, the GPS locations and detailed contents of an individual garden. We find that our overall activities when establishing records for the garden, together with providing advice on upkeeping the collection, also tends to reinvigorate the owner and/or administrator and encourages them to care for and take an interest in their garden, often after many years of low level maintenance. To date we have surveyed around 30 gardens and have freely provided advice on cultivation. This includes major estates, such as Balbirnie Park, an old Balfour family estate in Markinch extending to 400 acres, which Fife Council approached the Group for help with identifying the extensive rhododendron collection and recommending the clearance work to be undertaken to restore the gardens that are spread over 10 geographically segregated compartments. It took four separate visits, each a year apart, to gradually identify the plantings and make the necessary recommendations regarding clearance and labelling, which the team of gardeners took forward and

completed prior to our visit the following year. More recently, at the request of the University of Strathclyde, we spent a total of three days with the Head Gardener of Ross Priory identifying, labelling and providing advice on the conservation of the major rhododendron collection of both species and hybrids, together with setting-up arrangements for taking GPS readings.

In April 2013 the Group organised and managed the International Rhododendron Conservation Conference held in Edinburgh in liaison with the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE) and Botanical Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which brought together an audience of key rhododendron speakers and delegates from around the globe to discuss and set out a road map for taking conservation forward on a worldwide basis.

One of our on-going projects is the establishment of 'Out-based Collections' of threatened rhododendron species collected on the early plant-hunting expeditions that are becoming rare in ex-situ cultivation in Britain and which are listed in the *Red List of Rhododendrons*. In 2013 the Group formally founded a Joint Project with Forestry Commission Scotland to restore and replant the original out-based test garden established in 1924 by the RBGE in the highly attractive Glenbranter Glen with its many waterfalls cascading off the surrounding forested moorland, located nine miles north of what is now Benmore Botanic Garden. Several hundred conifers and species rhododendrons from the RBGE nurseries were planted in the Glen over a two-year period. In 1928 the RBGE were offered the use of the Younger Estate, that later became Benmore Botanic Garden, and commenced planting

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at the new out-based location, leaving their earlier plantings in-situ at Glenbranter Glen. Many of the original plantings still survive in the Glen along what is now a circular public trail known as 'Lauder's Walk'. Areas of the Glen have been cleared and each spring a large batch of large-leaved species, from the Fortunea, Grandia, Falconera and Auriculata Subsections, have been planted and these are now thriving in the Glen amongst the original plantings, including a host of *R. decorum* which have self-seeded. This continues to be a win-win project that is attracting an increasing number of public visitors to the Glen.

In 2013 the RBGE approached the Group to ascertain if we were interested in coming to an arrangement with the owner and Management Team of the Corrour Estate to restore the large collection of mainly species rhododendrons that had been left to their own devices since the late-1950s. This remotely located collection of 3,000+ plants was originally established on the side of a hill above Loch Ossian at 1250-1650ft elevation by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell in the years after 1910, as part of his experimental high-elevation plantings on open moorland of various types of conifers on the 40,000-acre estate. In liaison with the Corrour Management Team, the RBGE arranged for a member of staff to tag all the rhododendrons on the estate with a new set of sequential numerical tags, which were listed in a new file on the estate database. Dr. David Chamberlain then commenced an initial identification survey, which was difficult due to the vast number of self-seeded hybrids that had grown-up amongst the original plantings, coupled with the tall undergrowth and saplings that had been left to grow unchecked, since maintenance of the plantings had ceased many years previously. In some locations old birch trees had fallen amongst the plantings, either wind-blown or brought down by heavy snow.

In November 2013 an eight-man working party spent a long weekend, armed with a set of coloured tapes, began surveying and confirming the identification of plants in the first of 25 compartments along the south side of Loch Ossian, using white tape for original plantings to be retained, blue tape for original plantings that required pruning work, and red tape for the hybrids and saplings to be taken out. Work was slow due to access problems getting into the thickets of plants, the hillside was extremely wet underfoot, the plantings were rain soaked, and the midges were out in abundance! We completed three compartments on our first visit and the pruning work and removal of hybrids and saplings was carried out as a separate exercise arranged by the Management Team the following Spring. Last November, seven working-party visits later, sometimes in the snow, heavy rain and wind at high elevation, we completed the surveying of the collection in what has been a major project to restore the largest and most diverse rhododendron species collection in Britain, containing 255 separate species. In the midst of carrying out the restoration we created a second 'Out-based Planting', this time with four large batches of the Taliensia and Lanata Subsections; the Taliensia Subsection being a special trial, as these species do not perform well at low levels in Scotland and we believe they need to experience all of the seasonal changes to grow well in cultivation. To date our thoughts are proving to be correct as the plants are thriving and bushing out well.



The Working Party, on our seventh annual visit to Corrour, is taking a breather on the South Road around Loch Ossian, between carrying species to be planted along the Middle Path at 1450ft elevation. From left to right, John Roy, Ian Sinclair, David Chamberlain, Matt Heasman, Wang Liston and John Hammond. 2nd November 2019. Photo: John Hammond

For similar reasons we are now aiming to plant a trial of the Pogonanthum Section and we identified a suitable site, away from the main collection, last November. We have yet to carry out restoration work on separate rhododendron plantings on the side of the Loch along the North Road. These have already been identified and include two groups of Hardy Hybrids planted by Waterer's in 1895. Our work has been greatly assisted by the Corrour Management Team who have carried out all the recommendations we have made to date, including digging-out old drainage channels and providing new channels to get the water off the hillside, felling dead birch trees and falling trees, and removing the branches on many large conifers that were shading-out the plantings. The collection is now budding-up, bushing out and many plants that have not flowered for years are blooming each Spring.



Looking along the South Road where the restoration of the rhododendron collection compartments was completed a few years ago, the plants now have space to bud-up, bush-out and many are now beginning to flower properly for the first time in many decades. In June 2019 the Spring Conference took the form of a Study Weekend covering the history and development of the Corrour Estate, and the members of the Group were able to visit the Estate and see the work that has been carried out over the past seven years. Photo: John Hammond

Since our previous article, we established a nursery area for growing-on species plants in the Walled Garden at Gargunnock, near Stirling, from which plants were distributed in batches to plant-up 'Out-based Collections'. More recently, we have established a new nursery on a croft in Glencoe and have transferred all the stock, then added plants to be grown on in a new poly-tunnel. Previously, our nursery at Gargunnock was

*Continued overleaf*

periodically checked when a Plant Health inspection took place in the main garden. Last year we arranged a special visit by the Scottish Plant Health Inspectorate (SASA) to be sure that the contents of the new nursery met the bio-security requirements for establishing 'Out-based Collections'.

Following a detailed inspection of the whole site, no problems requiring further tests were found and the contents were cleared for planting elsewhere.

A couple of years ago we were offered the use of the East Glen on the Gargunnock Estate to establish a trial collection of rhododendron species that should perform well in Central Scotland. This is a Joint Project between the Gargunnock Estate Trustees and the RSCG, and the Trustees will clear areas within the Glen that require preparation work and carry out strimming and low-level maintenance, whilst the Group will provide the plants and maintain them. The first plantings took place last Autumn and a further planting will take place later this year, subject to the Covid-19 restrictions. The Glen will be open to the public in line with the arrangements for opening of the main garden at Gargunnock under the Yellow Book Scheme. We have also been offered other 'safe-sites' in major gardens to establish further 'Out-based Collections' and we have already identified suitable species to plant at these locations.

In 2014 the Group was approached by Sir Peter Hutchison and Peter Cox, who were having increasing problems caring for their garden at Baravalla in Argyll due to their advancing years, and had decided to ask the Group if they would be prepared to take over the maintenance and care of the garden, subject to mutual agreement being reached on a formal basis. Over the next couple of years discussions continued with the lawyers with a view to

seeking an arrangement to modify the existing Agreement under which the garden was established. In June 2016 a joint meeting was held between 'The Two Peters', and with the support of the Mackie-Campbell Family on whose land the garden stands, and the RSCG to seek a way forward under a new legal framework. That approach proved to be agreeable with all the parties, and the details of the maintenance work, the replanting arrangements, and securing the property for the future, were all discussed. Since that time the RSCG has gradually taken over the care and maintenance of the garden, created a new database record of the plantings which are all being relabelled, and are restoring areas of the garden, where required. Tree-surgery has been carried out on several aged specimens, regular working parties are taking place, grass cutting is being carried out by a contractor, and the Maintenance Director now has a maintenance plan in place. Fortunately, the transfer of the garden took place prior to Sir Peter Hutchison passing away last year, so he was able to make arrangements for the handover of the garden records and see the garden was being cared for in an organised way.

Last year we formally arranged to work with the RBGE in connection with their rhododendron conservation activities, including having an involvement with their 'Global Consortium for Rhododendrons' project.

*John M. Hammond,*

Hon. Secretary of the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

### ***Magnolia tamaulipana***

At the third attempt we have finally managed to grow this subtropical evergreen Mexican magnolia from the Tamaulipas to flowering size outdoors at Caerhays. It is the closest relative to *M. grandiflora* but nothing like as good.

It actually produced a flower in July 2019 but this was out and over while we were away at the Hampton Court flower show so it went unseen by anybody here. This year it has three flowers and the second bud is perhaps three to four weeks behind the one pictured here. The third is some way behind again. On Saturday 4th July the flower was still covered in its black casing, by Sunday 5th it was half open, and by the afternoon of Monday 6th the tepals had begun to turn creamy brown and were filled with fallen anthers. By Tuesday the tepals had all gone completely brown and started to drop. So you can see how easy it was to miss this unusual, and perhaps unique, event in the garden.



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The brief life of the flower of *Magnolia taulipana* at Caerhays

Of the three plants we have tried to grow, the successful one came from Roundabarrow nurseries. The plant shown here was planted in 2017 and it sat doing nothing for a year so we feared it would succumb to cold winds like the others. However, it not only survived the Beast from the East in March 2018, but actually started to romp away and is now about 7-8ft in height. It is hard to imagine a more sheltered position and it seems to enjoy dappled shade and some overhanging acer branches.

The scent is strong and pleasant in a magnolia sense but nothing like as strong as *Magnolia sapaensis* which produced five flowers at a young age last year a few yards away.



*Magnolia sapaensis* at Caerhays last year. Photos: Caerhays Estate

The last three hot dry summers have clearly suited this unusual species and another Mexican, *Magnolia macrophylla* ssp. *dealbata*, has performed similarly, albeit well into maturity here.

Charles Williams VMH

## Top 10 Yellow Rhododendrons in Pincroft Garden - 2020

I was recently asked by some gardening pals to name the best 10 yellow rhododendrons in my garden this year. I thought this sounds easy. However, when I started to think it through, I realised this was not going to be so straightforward.

I finally decided to base this exercise on hybrid elepidotes only. I have not worried about intensity of colour, just on pure performance and display in my garden this year. I have excluded species, lepidotes and dwarf rhododendrons and also deciduous azaleas.

'Hotei' would have been on my list, but I lost it last year and although I have replaced it, not for long enough to include it, so on final reflection this is the top ten from my garden this year:



R. 'Golden Wedding'



R. 'Barbara Reuthe'

Continued overleaf





R. 'Golden Coach' Photos: Andy Fly

'Golden Wedding'	'Barbara Reuthe'
'Crest'	'Jessica de Rothschild'
'Queen Elizabeth II'	'Odee Wright'
'Lunar Queen'	'Roza Stevenson'
'Golden Coach'	'Karen Triplett'

Next year, my list may be completely different. They do not all flower equally well each year.

Andy Fly

### Red taken as read

If you ask a school class to quickly write down the first number they think of between 0 and 10 and a colour, more than half are likely to write 7 and red. A group of adults may well do the same.

Why? 7 is dubbed by psychologists the 'magical number', associated with all good things, and red – red unsurprisingly always demands attention. It is the dominant colour, provocative, vibrant, red for danger, stop, go, anger, passion, drama. Red is the choice.

True red as a primary colour has neither blue nor yellow in it. But moving along in the small section of the red spectrum towards yellow into a group of clear reds without blue influence, like scarlet, vermillion, cardinal, brick, tomato, Chinese, cinnabar, blood, carnelian and so on, we find that these are curiously rare colours both among our native flora and in woody garden plants. Leafing through Keble Martin's pictorial *Flora* only the scarlet pimpernel and poppy are red without any blue adulteration. There are umpteen 'blue' reds, maroon, violet, wine, mauve, purplish pink, more complex, rather less satisfying and some rather muddy.

Though not frequent, there are notable clear red exceptions among woody garden plants – for example, some strikingly clear red rhododendrons and deciduous azaleas and their hybrids, some Kordes roses, *Chaenomeles* cultivars, *Campsis*, pomegranates and above all, many camellias...

There is nothing to beat the forms and hybrids of *Camellia japonica* as prime examples of these clear reds. In the soft light of an early spring, brilliant red camellias can spark a dull day into life and not only that, but green happens to be the complementary

spectrum colour to red and the dark shining green foliage of the camellia is the perfect foil to further enhance the effect of the clear uncomplicated red flowers.

There are many *C. japonica* cultivars in this 'pure' clear red category and here just a few are featured to illustrate the general point.



Photo: Maurice Foster

**Top row:** left to right is the popular and widely planted 1972 Nuccio introduction '**Bob Hope**', a semi double, with some scattered petaloids in a richly dark red large flower. Then '**Royalty**', a *japonica/reticulata* hybrid with showy large 12cm light red flowers on a 2m spreading shrub. In full flower this stops visitors in their tracks.

The small/ medium semi-double flowers are perhaps the darkest red of all on Nuccio's '**Black Magic**', flowers of unusual colour borne rather sparingly on an open upright shrub with wavy leaves.

**Middle row:** formal double small/medium flowered '**Forest Green**' is one of the last camellias to flower, on a north wall not at its best until well into May, when the flowers contrast beautifully with the extra glossy foliage and the lighter green of burgeoning young growth. Next my personal favourite of all red camellias, '**San Dimas**', semi-double, unrivalled for form and richness of red, with prominent yellow stamens. It was a chance seedling of compact leafy habit named either after the town in California or to commemorate the name of the original 'thief on the cross', next to Jesus.

Then a glossy satin dark red single, of startling brilliance, called '**Midnight Serenade**', another Nuccio dramatic red from 1973 on an open medium sized shrub.

**Bottom row:** starts with '**Dr Burnside**', a semi-double to paeony form of dark scarlet red on a bushy rather slow growing upright shrub. Then one of the richest of all dark cardinal red semi-doubles, '**Deep Secret**', raised by Les Jury using pollen from '**Bob Hope**'. Finally, one I picked out as an odd plant in a row in a garden centre which I take to be a clear scarlet/red form of 'Lady Vansittart', though it remains a puzzle, never having sported back. The combination of form and colour is exceptional.

Less than a magic 7 minutes to read this; and red is read...

Maurice Foster VMH



*Lilian Snelling: the rhododendron and primula drawings*

Author: H J Noltie

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I have to openly admit that Lilian Snelling has been on my own 'top ten' list of botanical artists for many years; consequently I am more than somewhat swayed in my enthusiasm for this new title.

A softcover book measuring 24cms x 22cms printed on a heavyweight semi-matt paper which does much to support and enhance the artwork. Importantly – worth mentioning that I was impressed by the packaging of my copy ensuring no damage whatsoever whilst in transit which can sometimes be the case for book purchases. Approximately one third of the contents are devoted to primulas whilst rhododendrons and their various images enjoy the remaining two thirds; the perfect excuse for bringing it to members' notice.

With the emphasis on the rhododendron plates – the images selected for reproduction are a mix of watercolours on mainly white paper and gouache on grey or shaded backgrounds together with the inclusion of just a few photographs; the text informs that she also employed inks in some circumstances to achieve and enhance accurate colours. At the same time similar comments can be attributed to the primula images.

Snelling was at RBGE for the period 1916–1921 and then moved to Kew for some thirty more years. For rhododendronophiles and others I guess that her name and reputation will already be well known alongside several of our favourite plant collectors of the period. You may have already encountered her artwork elsewhere in such titles as Stern's *Study of the genus Paeonia* et al. For anyone who has ventured to further their knowledge of plants will no doubt have witnessed her exemplary images in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* over a very long period. Important to emphasise that her skills extended far beyond just the *Rhododendron* and *Primula* genera. She produced some four hundred and thirty plant images during her time at RBGE, the majority of which were of rhododendrons. In contrast to the more structured layout of her considerable 'Bot Mag' contributions the images in this title frequently appear almost as skilled 'sketch book' style representations that record astute and careful observations of enlarged flower parts and plant structures. Many of the images have particular artistic appeal as they are an amalgam of pencil line drawings with certain parts highlighted in colour – highly effective. Guaranteed to attract the eye and define the point. Any of her images are worthy of

perusal by either a plantsman/plantswoman and/or artist. To confirm that I have read the contents from cover to cover several times – just one minor spelling error caught my eye attributed to p.35!

Botanical art has had a considerable revival during the last twenty to thirty years but Lilian's images certainly continue to hold their own and represent her as an astute observer. Increased knowledge of rhododendrons in general can be enhanced by reference to her images; they will direct you to botanical details that you may well have missed by previously only looking at live plant material. Overall – an educative text supported by excellent images from the paints and pencil of a very skilled artist: a rare treat and certainly worthy of a place on your bookshelf for a comparatively modest outlay! Would also make a very acceptable gift for a gardener of any genre! Not to be missed.

John Sanders

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

*Rupert Eley*

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## Dates for 2021

### Confirmed dates

Rosemoor Spring Competition

March 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup>

Rosemoor Rhododendron Competition

April 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup>

AGM, North West Branch Show & Centenary  
Cup Competition at Ness Botanic Garden,

Saturday May 8<sup>th</sup>

### Unconfirmed events

Savill Show (RHS Early Rhododendron,  
Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental  
Competition) normally in early April

Harlow Carr Show (RHS Late Rhododendron  
Show) normally in early May

*Further news in November Bulletin*

**Event updates to Christopher Legrand please:**

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