

# RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



## WESSEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2018

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Dear Members

What a cold and depressing winter we are going through, but despite this, spring bulbs, shrubs and trees are on the move. In our garden Camellia sasanqua 'Yume' is still flowering and a lot of our early spring flowering camellias are now bursting into bloom. Rhododendron 'Nobleanum Album' has been flowering on and off since early January. This is helping to lift our spirits after our disastrous start to the new year. Let us hope that the forthcoming season will be free of late frosts and we can all look forward to what lies ahead.

Various garden visits, shows, and our summer picnic are on offer for all our members and affiliated members to enjoy this year.

### Summer BBQ held at Sarum on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2017

The garden at Sarum is one of the branches favourites. This garden was created by Rod and Mary White and it is packed with all manner of treasures, including many very rare species. The garden is constantly being remodelled to suit their needs and maturity of plants. I would have to write a book to explain what this garden holds!

The day was a huge success and many members came from various branches of the RCMG. Lots of discussions, plant exchanges and good networking were achieved between members. We would all like to say a huge thankyou to Rod and Mary, for making us all so welcome.





The ladies did us proud!

## Garden Visits

### Autumn Walk - Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park

Unfortunately, our arranged garden visit had to be cancelled at short notice due to a family illness. We were very grateful for Polly Cooke to arrange a replacement Autumn visit at such short notice.

Our hosts, Jo Scrivener and Dick Farr, spent a great deal of time and patience showing us around and explaining how they are evolving the plantation.



My particular favourites on the day were:

- *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Orange Peel'
- *Cornus sanguinea* 'Magic Flame'
- *Nyssa sylvatica*
- *Sorbus cashmiriana*
- *Parrotia persica* 'Burgundy'

The weather was very kind to us that day and the autumn colours seemed to be at their peak.



There were also some stunning sasanqua camellias in flower, *C. Plantation Pink*, *C. Winter's Toughie* and *C. Rubra* to name a few.



## Talk by Rama Lopez-Rivera – ‘Wanderings in the Wild’ – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Rama is a full-time gardener at Ramster and a modern-day plant-hunter who has travelled to remote locations in China, Japan and neighbouring countries. Although young and at the early stages of his career, his experiences are already so extensive that the material could easily have covered at least three presentations.



The first part of the presentation covered Rama's 2011 trip to Taiwan, the home of *Rhododendron pseudochrysanthum*, *R. pachysanthum* and *R. morii*. There is much botanic discussion as to whether these are distinct species with the intermediate forms found in the wild being natural hybrids or whether evolution is in process with new species evolving through the isolation of mountain tops and deep valleys. However, from a gardener's perspective *R. pachysanthum* is one of the few species to possibly rival *R. yakushimanum* and the search for this plant was the ultimate goal of Rama's trip which hence involved the ascent of Nanhu Da Shan. During the early stages of the ascent plants appeared to be intermediate with *R. morii*. However, above 3500m Rama found some really fine plants of pachysanthum, with silvery foliage and brown indumentum comparable with some of the best forms in cultivation. The ascent of Nanhu Da Shan illustrated the very real dangers of such expeditions. One slide showed Rama walking along a steep mountain track. In an entertaining understated way Rama commented 'a little further on the path became rather 'steep'; the next slide showed the path somehow winding through a completely vertical and indeed overhanging cliff-face!

For many members of the Group our number one wish would be to see our favourite rhododendron *yakushimanum* growing wild on the mountains of the Japanese island of Yakushima and Rama first achieved this in 2013. Once again, the most distinct and compact forms were found towards the mountain tops. During the second section of the presentation, we were treated to many lovely slides of the beautiful mountainous landscape of this windswept island.

The third section covered Rama's Chinese adventures and in particular his ascent of Wa-Shan, he was just the fourth westerner to ever do so and the first since E H Wilson's ascent in 1903. This contained many more slides of dramatic landscapes together with a wide variety of plants. In addition Rama met interesting locals, who were equally intrigued to meet a westerner for the first time. The locals may be friendlier than in the days of the early plant-hunters, but other perils are still present. At one point Rama had to cross a dilapidated wooden bridge above a deep gorge and was alarmed to find many trusses already missing with many more at the point of collapse.

We were told that this was Rama's first ever presentation and we all felt privileged to have been part of this as surely it will be the first of many. Rama is due to make a presentation at the Rhododendron

Conference in Germany later this year and I am sure we all wish him well with this and with his future travels.

### Talk by Russell Beeson – Maddenias – 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017



Russell is one of the leading plantsmen of the Group and grows many different rhododendrons in his Dorset garden. These include a fine and increasing collection of maddenias. Russell's presentation was clear and informative and included much practical advice from a gardening perspective which was especially helpful to those of us with little knowledge of growing maddenias and indeed an inclination to avoid them because of their reputation for tenderness.

Russell maintains that maddenias are actually more difficult to grow behind glass than in the open because of the tendency to overheat in the summer. A surprising number grow well in the open ground and he has proved this in his own garden. In particular, he has found *R. formosum* and the hybrids 'Harry Tagg' and 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' hardy over several years. Even so, Russell grows most of his maddenias in pots where good drainage is essential. He gave us some top tips to achieve this. First, the use of fresh pine needles within the compost which tend to keep the compost open and provide routes to channel water. Second, the avoidance of the temptation to use shallow pots which may appear suitable for shallow-rooted rhododendrons as these don't drain as freely as more standard shapes. Russell keeps his pots in shade near the house for most of the year and only moves them to the protection of a garage during brief periods of very severe weather.

Many maddenias are renowned for having strong sweet scent and in *R. nuttalli* this is combined with stunning large white flowers with a glowing centre; one slide featured a magnificent large specimen in full flower.

Russell particularly likes *R. edgeworthii* for excellent heavily-textured foliage as well as nice scented flowers. These characteristics are also shown to some extent in its hybrids such as 'Fragratissimum' and 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam'

Perhaps the most dramatic of all was *R. dalhousiae* var *rhabdotum* with large exotic lily-shaped white flowers with a red stripe down each petal. Also beautiful, in a more subtle way, was 'Spinbur' a hybrid of *R. spinuliferum* and *R. burmanicum*. This has unusual trusses of flowers in the style of *spinuliferum* but a delicate pink colour and a good compact plant which he has grown outdoors for several years.

Russell is anxious not to mislead anyone and is resigned to the fact that he could well lose his entire collection of maddenias were a really severe winter to occur. He does also of course garden near the Dorset coast. Even so, several of us now feel inspired to try a few of these lovely plants in our own gardens.

### **Forthcoming Wessex Branch Flower Show**

Our annual show will be held at Ramster on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2018. It is late again this year to accommodate garden visits that are planned and other RCMG flower shows. Please check the show schedule that was forwarded earlier and which can be viewed on the RCMG web site for times etc.

### **Future Events**

The South East Branch have been invited to visit the garden of Mr. Michael Neal at Legsheath Farm, Legsheath Lane, East Grinstead RH19 4JN on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 2pm. If you are interested, please contact Barry Haseltine – [barry.haseltine@which.net](mailto:barry.haseltine@which.net)

Unfortunately we are still waiting for confirmation of dates, but I can confirm that we have been invited to the following gardens:

Weald Place, Sandling Park & Merton Place.

When confirmation is received we will email full details of address, dates and times.

### **Richard Thornton – Resigned Committee Member**

Richard has had to step down for ongoing health reasons as a committee member, and he will be greatly missed. He is one of our longest serving committee members approaching 40 years!

Talking to him recently about his life with the RCMG and his garden which was opened to the National garden scheme each year, he has enjoyed it all. He is also a brilliant painter and showed Jenny and I some wonderful scenes that he had painted and is still doing so. Although he loves all of our three genera, his passion is for the companion plants which we associate with them, particularly *Meconopsis* and *Trilliums*.

At our last meeting, all the committee members voted for Richard to become an honorary member of the Wessex Branch. As his health allows, we hope to see him at many of our future events. We all wish both Richard and Sue well.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish all our members the very best for the coming season.

**Andy Fly**

Chairman of the Wessex Branch