



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group



NEWSLETTER NO. 48 – SUMMER 2007

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Front cover illustration is of *Tulipa sprengeri* (see p. 8) and back cover pictures are of Liam Byrne's *Ramonda myconi* (top) and Susan Tindall's *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf'. (Photos: Billy Moore).

EDITORIAL

Imagine the sense of achievement that Liam Byrne must have felt when his seed-raised plant of *Ramonda myconi* was awarded the Farrer Medal at this year's Dublin Show. Most of his earlier 'Farrer' plants were also raised from seed. It is, of course, a triumph to win this award irrespective of the source of the plant, but there is an extra dimension when the grower has brought the plant from seed to best at Show.

But leaving Farrer Medals and showing aside, the satisfaction to be obtained from raising plants from seed is immense. Growing from seed is also very easy, it is ridiculously cheap especially if the seed is obtained from the seed exchange, and, perhaps most importantly, it is the best way to acquire rarities. Seed-raised plants will also be free of disease and generally speaking will have more robust constitutions than those propagated from cuttings for example. In order to avoid incurring the wrath of commercial growers I must make it clear that there is no suggestion that growing from seed precludes the purchase of plants: indeed some of the most committed seed sowers that I know are the best customers of good nurseries.

To be successful all that is required is a modicum of commonsense, patience and a little knowledge. This knowledge will be provided in the next newsletter which will include a comprehensive article on the seed-sowing process, including tips on how to tackle the somewhat daunting task of making your selection from the thousands of species in the seed list. As a prelude to writing this article I propose to send a questionnaire to around a dozen growers whom I know to be experienced and successful seed sowers and the article will be a distillation of their responses.

If you have not applied for seed from the seed list in the past you will have to apply for a copy. Details of the arrangements for the seed distribution in 2007 were provided in the June issue of the Bulletin. And don't forget to save seeds from your own plants over the coming months. You can sow these yourself or donate some to the Society – seed donors are entitled to more seed from the distribution and also get priority over non donors.

The Group is now again in a position to provide to members at a very reasonable price seven cm. rigid square plastic pots (See News and Views) which are ideal for raising alpines from seed. Just think, for little cost and effort you can increase greatly the range and rarity of the plants you grow in your garden and/or alpine house as well as having good plants to swap with other growers, to give to friends, to bring to plant sales and maybe even to win that elusive Farrer Medal.

NEWS & VIEWS

Despite repeated requests for your suggestions about the contents of the Newsletter I have had very little response so I am assuming that you are reasonably happy with what I am doing. As always any suggestions, positive or otherwise will be welcome. Remember that the Newsletter is intended for your benefit.

In this Issue

Jim McGregor, the Director of Shows reports on the Ulster Group Show at Greenmount and **George Sevastopulo** does likewise on our own Show at Cabinteely.

Liam Byrne continues his series of short articles on the propagation of some classic alpines dealing with the lovely ramondas in this issue. This is particularly topical as Liam won the Farrer medal (again) for his superb specimen of *R. myconi* at this year's Dublin Show. As you know Liam is one of the most successful growers of alpines in this country and writes from his own direct experience.

Various members have written accounts of our fixtures in the first half of 2007 and I am most grateful for their contributions. I try to get reports from as wide a range of members as possible so I may be asking you next, but please remember that if you feel unable to write about a talk or garden visit for any reason a refusal will cause no offense. On the other hand if you would like to contribute and you haven't been approached please let me know.

Fixtures

A list of the fixtures for the remainder of the year can be found on p. 26. The 2007 season continues with a very strong international flavour on Thursday, 20 September at the NBG with a talk from **Rod Saunders** on *Cape Bulbs*. Rod is a professional horticulturist and he and his wife **Rachael** run a mail order business in the sale of seeds and books. They are widely traveled, experienced and passionate plantspeople and, on conservation, hold the view that the best way to conserve plants is to cultivate them. This promises to be a stimulating lecture, and given the number of plants from South Africa that we grow in this country should be of considerable practical benefit also.

On 4 October **Panayoti Kelaidis** will speak on *Denver Botanic Gardens: Botanical Gem of Western America*, again at the NBG. Panayoti has a huge international reputation as a plant explorer, gardener and public garden administrator. He has lectured in nearly 100 cities in seven countries and has been featured in dozens of television, newspaper and magazine pieces. He is

committed to both the art and science of horticulture and has written over 300 articles for popular and specialist publications. It is an honour to have someone of his stature to address the Group. This is a lecture that should not be missed.

On Saturday, 13 October at 2.30 pm there is a visit to **Mount Usher Gardens** in Ashford, Co. Wicklow. We will be led around the gardens by the knowledgeable and enthusiastic Head Gardener, **Sean Heffernan**. Mount Usher, which is a national treasure, is worth a visit at any time of the year but in early October there is the added attraction of the spectacular autumn colour for which the gardens are noted. This should be a very pleasant and informative afternoon.

On Saturday 22 October the Ulster Group will present the annual **Dr Molly Sanderson Memorial Lecture** which will be given in Stranmillis University College, Belfast, at 2.30 pm by Peter Erskine, C.B.E, V.M.H., with whom many members will be familiar. Peter's talk is titled *Unfinished Business – 30 Years on Greensand*. Tickets can be had from Mrs Margaret Glynn, 2, Old Galgorm Road, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, BT42 1AL. Early booking is advised.

I am particularly looking forward on 8 November at St Brigid's Parish Hall, Stillorgan to hearing **Bob Gordon** of the Ulster Group talk on *Plants, Pleasures and Pains*. Bob is known to most of you and many will be familiar with his wonderful garden at Portglenone in north Antrim. Bob is a great plantsman, a very nice person and his talk will be full of good information on growing alpinists and is sure to be delivered with his usual wry sense of humour.

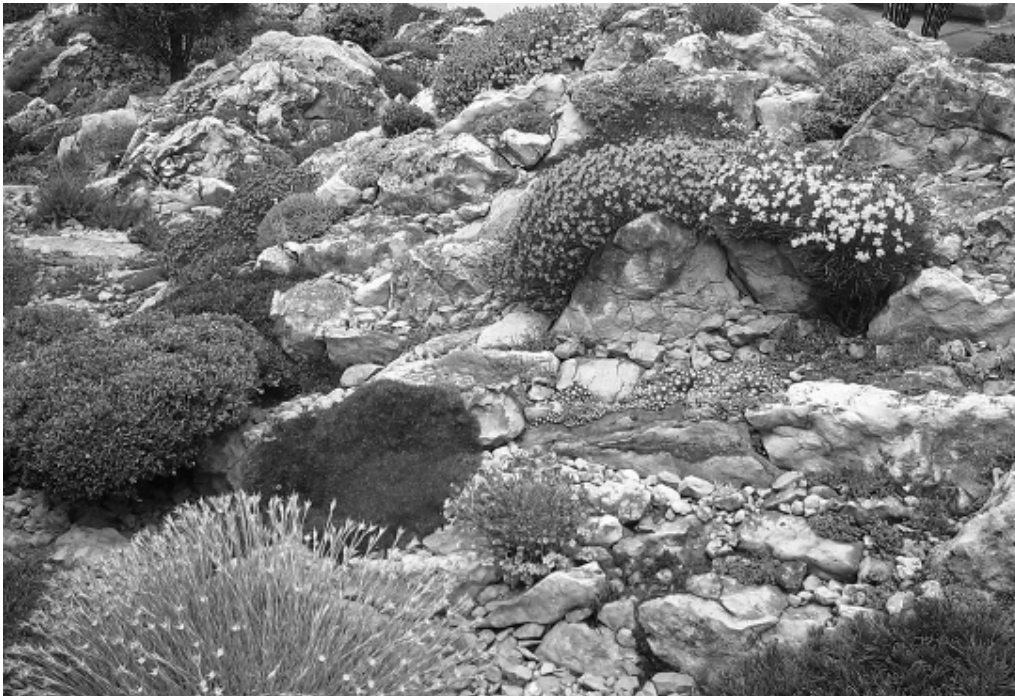
Our annual discussion weekend will take place at *An Grianán* in Termonfeckin from Friday, 16 to Sunday, 18 November. With **Jim Archibald, Jānis Rukšāns** and **George Sevastopulo** as speakers it seems likely to rival last year's superb event. Full details of the weekend as well as a booking form are included in the mail-out. I am serious when I say that early booking is advised. I have already reserved my place with Joan.

On 6 December **Carl Dacus** will entertain us in St Brigid's Parish Centre with *Turkish Delights*. As well as what I'm sure will be a fascinating talk from Carl, there will be seasonal refreshments.

A Chastening Experience in Prague

The Prague Rock Garden Club hosted the **1st Czech International Rock Garden Conference** in Beroun, a small town on the outskirts of the capital in early May. The Conference ran for four days and was followed by four days of visits to gardens throughout the Republic. The lecture programme was ambitious (we had nine lectures on one day) but very rewarding. The speakers were excellent and although it may be invidious to single out

particular individuals I was especially impressed by Robert Rolfe, Fritz Kummert and Jānis Rukšāns. The latter is, of course, one of our speakers at Termonfeckin this year and I hope Messrs. Rolfe and Kummert will be considered for future years. The Prague Rock Garden Club's annual Show coincided with the Conference and a visit to it was included. This Show as many of you will know is quite different from the Shows held here and in the UK in that it lasts for two weeks and is held out of doors. The Show features a plant sale which runs for the duration and offers a mouth-watering selection of plants at unbelievably low prices. The only constraint on us visitors was the weight restriction on the aeroplane, but when plants are bare-rooted it is surprising how little they weigh.



Detail of a Czech Rock garden showing the naturalistic placement of the stone. Photo: Billy Moore.

After the Conference we visited seventeen gardens and this was the chastening part. The quality of many of these gardens was amazing both in terms of the rockwork and the range of plants grown. For the latter, the Czechs have their climate to thank to some extent, but their cultivation and propagation skills were very obvious. As far as the rockwork is concerned they have an advantage over us also, in that suitable stone is readily available at reasonable prices, but the sheer artistry that was employed in the placement of the rocks in several of the gardens was simply stunning. I left Prague full of ideas about the changes I would make in my own garden when I got home; so far they are still just ideas.

I think our hosts are to be congratulated on a wonderful event and one that I hope they will repeat in a few years. I certainly learned a lot and was

inspired to try harder in my own gardening. Two fundamentals of alpine growing were emphasized for me: know where your plants are from and the conditions in which they grow in the wild; and when you acquire a rare or difficult plant propagate it immediately.

There were 170 delegates from all over the world at the Conference including no less than fifteen from Ireland, north and south.

Digital Photography Course

Val Keegan organized a course on digital photography which ran over six nights in October/November 2006. The course was given by the talented **Edwin Davison** who judges the artistic section at the Show each year. The syllabus dealt mainly with the manipulation and storage of digital images on computer. The participants were unanimous in their praise for the course. Edwin has agreed to repeat it if there is sufficient interest. Fifteen participants would be required and the fee for the course would be €50. Anyone who is interested should contact Val or any member of the Committee.

Autumn Local Show

In its wisdom the Committee has decided not to stage the local show this autumn due to a perceived lack of demand. I think this is a pity because these shows present members, especially new members, with an opportunity to raise cultivation and other issues with more experienced members. What do you think? Should we have an Autumn Show in 2008?

Pots and Labels

The first lot of pots sold out in no time and we have had some difficulty in sourcing more. We now have 7 cm rigid, black plastic pots for sale to members at 10c each and hope to have similar 9 cm pots shortly for around 15c. Suitable labels are proving more difficult to source but the search goes on. If you want pots you should phone **Michael Meagher** (01 8382368) well in advance of any meeting and he will bring your order along. Please try to ensure that you have the exact amount to pay for your order as Michael may not always have change.

Our Website

Jamie Chambers writes: Our local website (www.alpinegardensociety.ie) has now been in operation for over a year and continues to expand as ideas come to us (and I get the time!). But who uses the site? I have been analysing the information we get from our website host (the organisation that runs the website for us) and thought this would be a good time to share some of the statistics with you. Our host records the visitors to the site,

roughly where they came from and what they looked at, and examining this shows some interesting trends.

First and most important, use of the website is growing. There were 3,174 hits in May 2007, the last complete month, compared with 404 hits in July 2006. A hit is a request to our website for any kind of information – for example, it could be a page or a picture – so this shows that the volume of use has grown by a factor of about eight.

Second, more people are using it. The number of different sites visiting us (the addresses of people requesting information) has grown over the same period from 79 to 455, so clearly we also have a lot more users.

Third, we are more international! The number of countries where users are located has increased over the same period from 11 to 32. These numbers are fairly crude – for example, there are technical reasons why it is not always possible to determine where a user is located – but the trend is clear. We have users all over Europe, in North America (both the US & Canada), and the Far East (China & Japan). Occasionally we get a visitor from New Zealand – but that is generally my family!

Finally, though most people come into our site directly, many have been referred to it through searches (Google & Yahoo) and some are now coming to us via links from other sites (National Botanic Gardens, Main AGS, AGS Dorset, Ulster Group, The Garden School, SRGC). Images are a particular source of visits from search engines, and I even found that someone, somewhere in the world, has linked **Carmel Duignan's** *Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris' from December into their web log!

Tulipa sprengeri

I photographed this tulip in my garden on 22 May and was so taken by its beauty that I thought I would use it for the front cover of the Newsletter. *Tulipa sprengeri* hails from Turkey and is one of the very few tulips which likes woodland conditions. It is also the latest in the genus to flower and for me has a refinement and elegance which is unsurpassed by any other tulip. Unfortunately the bulbs will not tolerate being dried so you won't find it in the garden centres but (with a little patience) it is easy from seed, which is usually available from the seed exchanges. If provided with suitable growing conditions it will self seed and will in time build up to a substantial colony. Everyone should grow it.

Harry Wilka

I am sad to report the death of our former member Harry Wilka. Harry was a great and generous gardener and a very colourful character and will be missed. Our sincere condolences to his widow Odette and to his relatives and friends.

THE SHOWS

Ulster AGS Show, 2007

The Ulster Show is held in what is usually one of the damper areas of the UK, but not this year. There had only been a few millimetres of rain in the month prior to the show and Saturday itself was a glorious day. The warm dry weather caused the usual difficulties in keeping plants fresh for the occasion, but the sunshine on the day together with the grounds of Greenmount College made it a superb setting for an AGS show.

Primula bracteata is now a regular award winner at our shows and **Billy Moore's** well-flowered plant was awarded the SRGC Quaich for the best plant in a pan not exceeding 19 cm. The plant shown had been grown in a mix of John Innes no. 2, grit and peat. Removal of dead foliage in the autumn and care in avoiding over watering are necessary for success with this fine *Primula*.

The Farrer Medal for the best plant in the show was awarded to **Susan Tindall's** *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf'. The double pink flowers topped off a mound of fresh green foliage. Propagated from tiny pieces of underground shoots, the plant on show had been grown on in the same pot for three years. Several other forms of this delightful shade-lover appeared in various classes around the show.

A number of good specimens of a particularly fine clone of *Levisia tweedyi* were noticed. Closer enquiry showed that they had all been exhibited by **Liam Byrne** and that they were all cuttings from the plant that had won a Farrer medal several years earlier. Your reporter's interest immediately resulted in an offer of a cutting which is now established back in Worcester.

A plant of the delightful little hardy orchid, *Anacamptis longicornu* (formerly *Orchis longicornu*) was shown by **Bob Gordon**. This makes a delightful plant for the Alpine House where it needs a dry summer rest, followed by repotting in the early autumn.

Good pans of *Trillium* have always been a feature of the shows on this side of the water. This show was no exception, and several pans of *T. rivale* were staged. The rather more difficult *T. nivale* was represented by a good panful shown by **Mark Smyth** in Section C. His plant had been grown in a mixture of loam, grit and leaf mould and had been left undisturbed for two years. After a year while it settled in without flowering, it performed to

perfection in time for this year's show. This deservedly won the C. H. Hammer Trophy for the best plant in Section C.



*A delighted Susan Tindall with her Farrer Medal-winning plant of *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf'. Photo: Billy Moore.*

As well as the show itself, the usual Ulster hospitality and friendliness made this an enjoyable visit.

Jim McGregor, Director of Shows

Dublin AGS Show 2007

The news that gentians were in full flower in the Burren, a month ahead of their due season, coupled with the later-than-usual date of the Dublin Show must have filled the Show Secretary, **Valerie Keegan**, with trepidation. In the event, entries were only marginally down on the previous year and the benches were generously covered. Surprisingly, relatively few plants new to the Irish show benches were on view, reflecting the restricted range of

plants we grow for exhibition. This is probably because of the proximity in time of the Dublin Group and Ulster Group spring shows and the lack of a summer show.

Over the past few years entries for the Artistic Section have increased in number greatly; this year saw the largest entry yet, which was of an extremely high standard.

AGS shows are, quite rightly, about plants. There are, however, other facets of a show, which are much appreciated by visitors and exhibitors alike. Our Show has built an enviable reputation for the quality of the refreshments on offer: seated on a stage overlooking the exhibition area, you can plant- or people-watch, while drinking a cup of tea and eating an excellent home made cake. **Ann Nolan** and **Patricia McGeown** are to be congratulated on their management of the 'teas'. The raffle, organised by **Rose Sevastopulo**, provides a vital source of income; this year the prizes included a pot decoratively planted with alpines, for which thanks go to **Brian Wood** of **Murphy and Wood Garden Centre**, and a basket of four classy plants – a Turkish *Lamium*, *Primula* 'Rufus', *Tropaeolum azureum*, and a decorative *Veratrum* – to tempt exhibitors to part with their Euro. The other major source of income is our own plant stall, manned by **Anna Nolan**. It is not too early to identify plants for propagation for next year's show!

And now for the plants: the Farrer Medal was awarded to a magnificent *Ramonda myconi* grown by **Liam Byrne**, our premier exhibitor. The plant, raised from seed sown some ten years ago, and grown in a 1/1/1 mixture of loam, grit and leaf mould, with two to three feeds of tomato fertiliser per year, formed a dome of immaculate leaves topped with white flowers with the barest flush of pink. It was in marked contrast to the same species in the walls in my garden, which, on show day, were toasted to a crisp. Liam also won the ACC Cup for the most first prize points in the Open Section, the Ulster Group Trophy for three pans of rock plants raised from seed and the David Shackleton Trophy for the best pan of *Primulaceae* for a nice pot of the yellow *Primula forrestii*.

Congratulations to **Noelle Anne Curran** and **Miriam Healy**, winners of the Barney Johnson Trophy (most first prize points in Section B) and the Termonfeckin Trophy (most first prize points in Section C), respectively. Noelle Anne also won an AGS spoon for the six pan class and the Waverley Trophy (best plant in Section B) with a well flowered *Daphne retusa*. Miriam won the Brian Wood Trophy (one pan rock plant raised from seed in Section C) and **Janet Mathias** won the Millennium Cup (for the best plant in Section C) with a pot of *Fritillaria pallidiflora*.

Billy Moore repeated his success of two weeks before by winning an AGS Medal for his entry in the class for six small pots in A section. His venerable cushion of *Gypsophila aretioides*, now some 30 cm. in diameter, was awarded a Certificate of Merit, as was his attractive pan of *Pulsatilla patens* in its yellow form. I also admired Billy's small plant of the hardy Californian *Dudleya cymosa* in flower and made a mental note that in time it might break the tyranny of *Crassula socialis* in the Class for *Crassulaceae*. **Susan Tindall** won the Jacki Troughton-Smith Trophy for the best pan of *Ericaceae* with a lovely compact and fresh *Cassiope lycopodioides* 'Jim Lever' and the Margaret Orsi Bowl for the best plant from North America for a large pot of *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf', which had won the Farrer Medal at Greenmount. Susan was also awarded a Certificate of Merit for a pot of *Fritillaria affinis*.

Plants exhibited by the **National Botanic Gardens**, Glasnevin are now a regular feature of the Show. This year their *Grevillea alpina*, a nice form of known provenance (the late Mrs Guinness, Howth), which is now extremely rare in Irish gardens; and a magnificent plant of the dwarf Tasmanian conifer *Microcachrys tetragona*, gained Certificates of Merit.

George Sevastopulo



*Liam Byrne with his Farrer Medal winning *Ramonda myconi* being congratulated by AGS President, Frank Tindall. Photo: Billy Moore.*

Ramondas

Ramond de Carbonnieres gave his name to the lovely ramondas. There are three species in the genus: *R. serbica* from northern Albania, *R. nathaliae* from the Balkans and *R. myconi* from the Pyrenees. They all form rosettes of rough corrugated green leaves with a rusty golden colour underneath. The flower buds are formed at the base of the leaves and the flower arises from the centre of the rosette on 9 cm. leafless stems.

R. serbica is less beautiful than the other two and is very rare in cultivation. *R. nathaliae* is the gem of the genus and is easiest to grow. *R. myconi* was named *R. pyrenaica* when I first grew it and is by far the most floriferous of the three.

Propagation

Propagation is by seed sown in the spring but the very tiny seedlings are slow to reach flowering size. When I first grew *R. myconi* from seed it was five years before it flowered for me. Propagation by leaf cuttings taken in the summer gives quicker results, but the fastest way to get a new flowering plant is by division although great care is needed as the root system is weak and easily damaged.

Cultivation

Most books will advise you to plant ramondas in a shady rock crevice facing north or northeast. This is the ideal, but unfortunately, in gardens today few of us have this exact situation. If, however, you plant them in a shady position in a free draining moisture-retentive soil they will thrive for years. Ramondas are not fussy about soil ph, doing well in both acid and alkaline conditions. Although they are reasonably drought resistant they appreciate an occasional soaking during dry spells which will keep them healthy.

Ramondas are also very amenable to pot culture. I grow them in a compost consisting of one part John Innes no. 2, one part grit and one part leaf mould or peat. They require plenty of water while in growth so during the summer plunge them in the garden in a north facing position. If you have a plunge bed under the staging in the alpine house, place them there for the winter, keeping them just moist. The edges of the outer leaves are inclined to turn brown and there is a temptation to remove them. A word of caution, the embryo flower bud is already formed at the base of the leaf so by removing it you will also remove the bud thus reducing your flower power. If you want to show your plants remember that time slips by very quickly between each year's show, so you should be preparing now for 2008.

Book Review

The Caucasus and its Flowers by Vojtěch Holubec and Pavel Křivka

The publication of this magnificent book has been awaited anxiously by lovers of mountain flowers all over the English speaking world. It is the first fully illustrated guide to the flora of the Caucasus and is a very important addition to the literature on alpine plants. It was published privately by the authors in Prague. Their love of this 1000 km long mountain range between Europe and Asia is very evident throughout. They express the hope that their book “will contribute to a better general knowledge of Caucasian species and to a greater interest in growing them and will bring new admirers to the magnificent and miraculous Caucasus”. I am sure that hope will be fulfilled on all counts.

The book provides a detailed description of 509 species almost all accompanied by at least one photograph. As well as pictures of plants there are also many wonderful photos offering breathtaking views of the rugged landscapes in which the plants grow. There are also useful maps.

The first 70 pages provide a detailed description of the mountains including their geography, geology, and climate; an overview of the flora and other vegetation; and a discussion of the different habitats ranging from steppes to sub-alpine meadows. There is a history of plant exploration in the region and a section on access which provides useful information for the traveller including some pointers to local ‘hotspots’ which are best avoided at present, e.g., Chechnya and its borders.

For most of the species described there are notes on cultivation which are generally helpful. It needs to be borne in mind though that these notes are based on growers’ experiences in the Czech Republic where conditions are more suited to the growing of alpinists outside than is the case in Ireland. For example we are told that *Daphne glomerata* should be grown in “humus-rich soil with grit, in a cold but light place.” This plant is not growable in Ireland although **Brendan Marnell** is still gamely trying, and given his success with so many other daphnes perhaps he will prove me wrong.

Some of the plants described will be known to experienced growers of alpinists but many will be new to all but a few. Vojtěch’s seed list includes lots

of plants from these mountains and access to this book will make my seed order from him less of a lottery. The authors are to be congratulated on a quite splendid publication which is scholarly but accessible, a handbook for growers of alpine plants and a wonderful read for any lover of mountains and their flowers.

Holubec, V. and Křivka, P., *The Caucasus and its Flowers*, Prague, 2006. ISBN 80-902541-3-6.

A few copies of the book are available at €80 – contact any member of the Committee. If you would like to receive his seed list you should write to Vojtěch Holubec at Sídlíštní 210, CZ – 165 00 Praha 6, Czech Republic. Email: Holubec@vurv.cz.

Billy Moore

Review of Recent Group Events

***AGM and Raised Beds and Tufa* by Brendan Marnell**

The 2007 season opened with the AGM in our new Southside venue on 25 January followed by a talk from Brendan Marnell on his garden.

The business of the AGM was disposed of quickly and efficiently. After three years in the job **Mary Glennon** decided to step down from the post of Hon. Treasurer. Our thanks must go to Mary for the exemplary way in which she did this tough and under acknowledged job, making the production of the annual accounts a formality. She is succeeded by **Tessa Dagge** who has our best wishes and who undoubtedly will maintain the high standard set by Mary.

During a discussion on the accounts there was a proposal from the floor that the Committee should consider reducing the membership fee having regard to the Group's substantial bank balance. There was little support for this proposal with the general view being that the current level of fees represents very good value. Also the Committee is facing the likelihood that a new projector, probably digital, will need to be acquired in the immediate future.

A warm welcome was expressed for the long awaited publication of **Vojtěch Holubec's** important book on the flowers of the Caucasus. It was suggested that the Committee should consider buying some additional copies to serve as gifts for lecturers and others. It was also suggested that

the Group should make a donation to Vojtěch given the losses he has sustained on the venture. It was pointed out that the Ulster Group had already made a generous donation to him. The Committee will consider these proposals.

With the formal part of the evening out of the way Brendan Marnell, who has been a member of the Group since 1986, treated us to an absorbing account of the development of his garden since 1973. Brendan's self-deprecating style and humour added greatly to the audience's enjoyment of his talk which was by way of a preview of the planned visit to the garden on 31 March. While a significant part of the presentation dealt with his two tufa cliffs, his scree bed and the many choice alpinists enjoying these conditions Brendan also took us around other parts of the garden, dwelling in particular on his collections of azaleas, dwarf rhododendrons and daphnes. He made the point very strongly that by observing conditions in the wild it is possible to understand the conditions essential for success in the garden. Listening to advice from experts such as **Ron Beeston** (one of Brendan's heroes) has also been invaluable in helping to please the treasures that Brendan grows. The alpine collection is wide and choice, including plants that are relatively easy to those which many of us have difficulty with even in the alpine house, all of them grown to a very high standard. If one wishes to see plants like dionysias and androsaces growing outside in Dublin I believe I am correct in saying this can be experienced only at 7, Leopardstown Avenue. Everyone in the hall I'm sure put a special note in their diaries not to miss the opportunity to see a unique garden on 31 March. I will certainly be there. (Ed.)

***Accommodating the Trickier Alpines in the Garden* by Alan Furness.**

Delighted though I am to attend any AGS lecture, it is nevertheless with a sense of trepidation. I know what I'm in for: impossibly beautiful plants, dauntingly difficult to grow. Alan Furness's wonderful talk on *Accommodating the Trickier Alpines in the Garden*, given at the NBG on 1 February, was different. Here was someone who encouraged our aspirations while conveying hope and practical advice in equal measure. I came away with a much better understanding of the types of environments a home gardener can attempt and how to achieve them. Alan took us through tufa, crevice, scree and moraine, illustrating each terrain with his 'choice plants', not necessarily exotic alpinists but beauties even I could attempt.

The dry stone wall seemed beguilingly simple, and *Rhododendron forrestii repens* looked wonderful in it, as did *Primula aureata*. As interesting as the plants were the techniques. Planting into tufa will be no problem with Alan's shaped half-pipe to slide the seedling into the hole, packing with dry compost before watering it in. His *Primula x miniera* and *Callianthemum anemonoides* are now well up on my wish-list. Raised beds were next. I was impressed (of course) by the *Aciphylla congesta*, though I imagine the *Campanula alpestris* was more to the liking of those not from the antipodes.

The section on the crevice garden was particularly detailed, showing all phases of construction, providing a list of tools and encouraging us to become stonemasons. I imagine Dublin saw a run on bolster chisels in the week following. He demonstrated techniques for planting in gap, crevice, crack, or wall and discussed top dressing and shelter. More than that, he discussed the benefits of crevice gardens in detail, covering shade, sun and situation. I hadn't before appreciated so clearly all these advantages. The possibility of multiple environments congenial to alpiners in a small area is of course the attraction of the crevice garden, but even without Alan's wonderfully clear explanations, his plants - *Androsace x hirtella*, *Oxalis laciniata*, and *Dianthus microlepis* 'Rivendell' were my favourites - would have converted me. A wonderful talk.

Jamie Chambers

Annual Lunch

The Annual Lunch was held in the delightful surroundings of the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire arranged as usual by **Joan Carvill** on Saturday, 24 February. As has often been the case the weather was lovely and the sun sparkled on the waters of Dun Laoghaire harbour as we enjoyed the excellent lunch provided by the club. This is always a very pleasant social occasion and gives members an opportunity to mingle and chat with each other and with those members of the Ulster Group who invariably join us on the day. After lunch **Peggy Parker** was presented with her Gold Bar for her accumulated seventy five first prizes in the Artistic Section of the shows and **Michael Meagher** with his Bronze Medal for ten firsts for his plants. Congratulations to them both.

After a break we were treated to a super talk (despite some difficulties with the projector) from **David Lapsley** of the Ulster Group on *Beautiful Patagonia*. Apart from the plants (of which more later) David described the area in some detail giving us information about the inhabitants, the geology,

climate and wildlife. David is an excellent photographer constantly winning prizes in the annual photographic competition in the Bulletin and his landscape studies evoked gasps of admiration from the audience. Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of his presentation was the fact that it was based on a trip that took place over a mere three days. It was difficult to comprehend how so much could have been achieved in such a relatively short time. David's secret was his very knowledgeable guide, the redoubtable Julietta, who ensured that no time was wasted and provided all the background information on the region.

The plants of South America are becoming more widely cultivated but many of them still remain intractable, challenging even the most expert growers. Their sheer beauty will ensure that efforts to grow them well will continue and the range of plants that David showed us was a good representation of the flora of the region. Some of the plants were familiar, *Alstroemeria ssp.*, *Oxalis ssp.*, *Calceolaria ssp.* etc. but many such as *Leucheria ssp.*, *Chlorea magellanica* and *Oreopolus glacialis* were less so. Perhaps the star of the show was *Benthamiella nordenskjoldii*, an absolutely gorgeous steppe cushion. A most interesting and enjoyable afternoon. (Ed.)

Spring Local Show and Workshop

The Local Show and Workshop was held this year on Saturday 25th March in St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan on a beautiful sunny afternoon. Despite competition from other events taking place that day the Show was well attended. I was entering plants in the Show for the first time and was a little apprehensive. Plants that looked good at home did not look quite so good when compared with those seen on entering the hall. I need not have worried, however, as I received lots of friendly, helpful advice and encouragement from more experienced members. The quantity and quality of plants was outstanding for a local Show. *Cyclamen repandum*, *Trillium rivale* and various narcissi and primulas were among those that caught my eye.

As always at these events there was a great spirit of camaraderie, and on this occasion friendly rivalry was much in evidence. **Valerie Keegan's** exhibit of *Narcissus bulbocodium* was best in show and **Noelle Ann Curran** won the medal for most points scored.

Valerie Keegan and Billy Moore gave a Workshop on taking cuttings. Each described their preferred method for rooting; Valerie using compost in the lower part of the pot while Billy favoured using Perlite in place of grit. We were all invited to have a 'hands on' go at taking cuttings and mixing the

medium ourselves - all materials supplied. We set to work enthusiastically. It was good fun, each of us finishing with a pot of five or six cuttings. Armed with such good advice on watering and general care, surely we will have success. Here's hoping!

As always the cup of tea or coffee was very welcome plus the chance to meet up with friends, compare notes and obtain useful advice. Advice is always very freely given to those who ask for it, as I know from experience. The raffle rounded off the afternoon and I am sure we all left with happy memories of a great show.

Pat Kennedy

***Making it easy with Alpines* by Ciaran Burke**

Sallynoggin to Mayo: that was the challenge that Ciaran had chosen as he told us in his talk on Thursday, 29 March. Gardening had changed a huge deal for him with his move to the west of Ireland; now he had an acre of wilderness to get under control. Alpine house plants had to be integrated into the garden following some modification of the soil as necessary. The use of troughs or a tufa wall can be used for the more difficult alpines, and we can build them if we are dedicated enough. If you wish to make your own trough you can find instructions on the internet.

Many plants are easy and also very desirable, such as *Narcissus bulbocodium*. Supermarkets have some easily grown bulbs. Dwarf tulips, which are not fussy, were shown that looked very healthy. Some alpines can take over a rockery so read up about them before planting. When building a raised bed keep it rustic looking, and use good foliage combinations for visual interest. A raised bed gives increased drainage which suits the plants and remember to feed alpines too as they do need it, especially if they are living in pots. Many will bloom throughout the year, not just in spring. Alpines are good for low maintenance gardens, some having foliage interest.

Ciaran now lives in an area with bog-type conditions in places and it can be quite cold, with more snow than he was used to in the east of Ireland. He is about an hour away from Galway on the Mayo/Roscommon border. One particular plant, *Aciphylla glauca*, is doing very well since his move. Other plants growing well are *Aubrieta*, *Cerastium*, *Phlox subulata*, *Celmisia* ssp. – daisy like flowers, *Libertia* – with a soft blue flower, which is available for purchase in Fernhill, *Sedum canticola* ‘Coca cola’- has a pink flower and is easy to propagate, as is *Sempervivum* ‘Bronco’.

Rhodanthemum hosmariense, previously called chrysanthemum, flowers all the year round. *Othonna cheirifolia* has fleshy leaves and a yellow flower. Dwarf conifers such as *Pinus mugo* 'Mops' give good interest throughout the garden, and *Juniperus horizontalis* 'Lime Glow' produces good ground cover and beautiful colours. A *Podocarpus sp.* produces lovely red berries as long as you have the male and female of the species. Under the pine trees where the soil is acid is where *Muscari* 'Valerie Finnis' is happy to grow. *Parochetus communis* is quite hardy with its shamrock-like leaves and blue flowers.

A member of the ginger family is *Roscoeia beesiana*, another easy one, and flowers late in the year. *Arisaema ciliatum* has an exotic flower and leaf, and the blue *Corydalis flexuosa* prefers the moister areas in the garden. There was a 'super' plant bought from Mount Stewart, Co. Down called *Chrysosplenium macrophyllum* with colourful foliage and pretty white flowers. *Lathyrus vernus* 'Alboreus' is another easy plant as, of course, is *Cyclamen hederifolium*. Some ipheions can be a bit too lusty but *I.* 'Rolf Fiedler' is more easily controlled with its onion-scented leaves. *Cornus canadensis* relishes a moist area to produce its white flowers, and *Erodium x variable* 'Roseum' is another 'super' plant that flowers for months.

It is certainly obvious that Ciaran has mastered his new garden with its change of climate and growing conditions and we all enjoyed his information and colourful slides.

Maeve Spotswood

Visit to Brendan Marnell's Garden

Surfing the net one evening I decided to have a look at the AGS Dublin Group web site to see who was coming to lecture. My attention was drawn to a garden that was open for the Group – 'Saturday, 31 March, Garden Visit, Blackrock. Brendan Marnell has invited us to see his tufa wall and wide range of rare alpines'. Having been to the Czech Republic to look at gardens twice already and seeing what they can do with tufa I decided to mark the calendar and make it a date. I had always fancied a vertical tufa wall or an almost vertical rockery against the wall of the back garden. The day came with lovely sunshine and warm for the time of year. I started off straight after breakfast just in case of delays and not quite knowing where I was going. I got to Dublin in good time but panic started with the M50 at almost a standstill. I eventually reached Leopardstown Avenue four hours after leaving Antrim (town). Arriving at the house it was great to see familiar faces.

The first thing to see in the front garden is a giant trough planted with an Acer. Walking through the side gate I was amazed at the size of the garden and right beside me was one of two tufa walls. It was covered with a green net to stop the birds pulling it apart but Brendan's son allowed me to remove the cover for an unhindered view. Due to the early spring many plants were past their best but it was brilliant. Drabas, saxifragas, primulas and various other cushions were looking great. Just outside of the living room window was a granite rockery made from very large bits of stone. The largest plant, but not looking out of proportion, was a rhododendron. The labeling was very good with professional-looking engraved labels on small plastic 'sticks'. Beyond this was another tufa wall with the best draba I have ever seen. I'm lucky to get 10 flowers on mine but this one was covered. A small *Primula allionii* was lovely and perfect even if it only had two flowers. A few strings from the Perspex canopy brought water down to plants that needed it most.

The most exciting part of the garden that pulled me away from the tufa was the daphne collection. Most were still in bud but showing great promise. They included the tiny *D. petraea* 'Cima Tombea' and a *D. calicicola* laden with buds. I later heard there were up to fifty in the collection. Most of the daphnes were growing in the rockery and some in troughs on the patio area. I took many photos but soon lost place with my notes. At the centre of the rockery area was a small pool with a huge piece of limestone that dripped water from a hidden source. Hepaticas and linums nestled among the daphnes. The rest of the rockery had a large collection of rhododendrons including a huge *R.* 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam'. This slightly tender plant has a brilliant scent that will fill any small garden

In the lawn was a large scree area with many plants I hadn't seen before but immediately lusted after such as *Helianthemum canum*, a ground-hugging rhodanthemum and a lovely campanula that followed the gaps in the stones.

I went back to the garden during the Dublin Group show and was amazed at the spring colour. The daphnes totally blew me away!!

This is a garden I could go to over and over through the seasons to see the changes. If the garden is open again make sure you go.

Mark Smyth

***Bulb Log Live* – by Ian Young.**

A discernible air of anticipation among old AGS hands greeted the casual visitor to the NBG, Glasnevin on 19 April. The observation that a delegation of our friends from Northern Ireland had made the journey south served to heighten the mystery and it was clear that something special was anticipated in the evening's proceedings. Several of Ireland's most

recognizable and respected gardeners had braved the uncertain traffic conditions to attend and a larger than average audience had gathered. Ian Young, a stalwart member of the Scottish Rock Garden Club was to speak to the topic of his bulb log. Catching the attention of his rapt listeners from the very beginning, Ian described his experience in recording his bulb growing in an on-line diary, now in its fifth year, and readily accessible through the Scottish Club's website (www.srgc.co.uk).

The hallmarks of a good lecture are a central theme, strongly developed, tested and examined from multiple angles with concurrent development of secondary themes. Experienced lecture attendees know that all too often this format fails spectacularly but, if well executed, offers a mesmerizing and memorable result. Happily, this was one of the latter experiences. Ian combines great horticultural knowledge with long years of practical growing experience, superb plant photography and keen observational skills of plants and the insects which bedevil or become them. Combined with his relentless attention to taxonomic detail, his thoughtful and informed hypotheses on the functional attributes of different aspects of floral composition and his manifest curiosity about and love of bulbs, the ingredients of a highly informative evening were in place. His delivery was clear, passionate, opinionated and informed. Self deprecation and confessions of failure to coax the best performance from a plant were willingly admitted, finding common ground with this listener at least, and offering hope of future improvement to the less experienced of his audience. The consistently high standard of his plant photography was central to the enjoyment of the talk and he spoke eloquently and enthusiastically of digital photography, his use of the tripod and the post image processing in which he engages to ensure that the colours of the flowers are a true reflection of the human eye image and not a digitally enhanced misrepresentation, with which all gardeners are only too familiar in some of the more popular catalogues!

The number of genera covered and spoken of in detail was too extensive to record. Suffice it to say that many in the audience were scribbling the names of their favourite examples of species and hybrid narcissus long after Ian had progressed through snowdrops, to crocus, en route to trilliums, eranthis, scilla and fritillaria. His consistent message was to encourage his audience to collect seed and grow bulbs from seed and he offered much practical advice on successful approaches to seed growing, generously sharing his own observations, ranging from the benefits of plastic pots over clay in the bulb house, to the composition of his favourite bulb growing medium (two parts loam, two parts grit and one part leaf mould). Nothing seemed to be beyond his eagle eye, from the watering regime he has found most successful, to the preferred use of dry potash over foliar feeds for post flowering period feeding of bulbs as the leaf growth slows.

Ian articulated the very spirit of gardening, so often evident among great gardeners – a desire that “rare and interesting plants be available to everybody who is interested in growing them”. He showed no time for exclusivity, hoarding or possessiveness in gardening, repeatedly crediting his mentors in gardening with having given him seeds of this plant or that, as he progressed through the kaleidoscope of plants from all corners of the planet with which he entertains himself in the round of the gardening year in his Aberdeen garden.

Plant highlights of this wide-ranging lecture will inevitably prove personal, but the gardener in this reporter was glad to learn that *Narcissus* “Cedric Morris” is the longest flowering of all narcissus, flowering from December to April, while the scientist was intrigued to learn that the reason for such remarkable longevity is that, by not setting seed, the flowers persist over such a long period in an ongoing attempt to maintain readiness to do so. It sounds so logical when thus explained but working it out from first principles requires insight and understanding beyond most of us. A magnificent photograph of *Lilium mackliniae*, grown to flowering size from seed in only 2 years, was inspiring enough to prompt the foolhardy to try it for themselves.

It will indeed be a surprise if there is not an overwhelming demand for seeds from the AGS, SRGC and other sources this autumn and it will certainly not be Ian Young’s fault if his audience at Glasnevin do not take up his challenge in this respect. Ian described his garden as a cross between a library and a museum. In respect of educational opportunity and passion for knowledge, this was probably a good analogy. Ian’s garden, like his lecture, reflects all these attributes. I suspect that the hits on his bulb log are about to increase significantly following this memorable and inspiring lecture from a gifted gardener and communicator.

Willie Reardon

‘The Habitats of the Burren’ by Mary Angela Keane

This talk was delivered by Mary Angela, who has an intimate knowledge of the area, on 10 May at the NBG as a curtain raiser to the Group’s planned visit to the Burren later in the month. I was in Prague at the time and, unfortunately, I omitted to ask someone to write a report on the talk for the newsletter. I did, however, speak to a number of people who attended on the night and the consensus was that it was an excellent talk and was particularly valuable to those attendees who intended going on the trip. My apologies to Ms Keane and to you dear reader for the absence of a detailed report on this event. (Ed.)

Burren Visit

On Friday 25 May 24 members of the Dublin branch, our friends, Alfred, Rena, and Heather from the north and Sheila from England gathered in the Hydro Hotel in Lisdoonvarna. After dinner that evening **George Sevastopulo** who was our guide for the trip gave us a comprehensive preview of what we would see in the next two days.

It is difficult to do justice to the subjects he touched on. Not only were we made aware of the uniqueness and diversity of the Burren flora where plants from the arctic, the Alps, the tropics and from the Iberian peninsula grow together abundantly but also of its geology, the effect of weathering by water, its remarkable archaeological remains from Neolithic to the seventeenth century but also the problems of conservation of this fragile environment.

The Burren is a spectacular and mysterious place consisting of vast flat limestone platforms, bare terraced hills and, in the east, damp grassy lowlands full of disappearing rivers and seasonal lakes (turloughs) interspersed with terraced slopes. Its salient geology dates back 350 million years when the limestone was deposited. Though over layered by shale, during the last ice age retreating glaciers scraped the surface clear in some places and in others deposited rich alluvial soil. The key to the landscape is water. The slightly acidic water has reacted with the limestone, forming a solution that has resulted in the formation of grikes (crevices), caves and turloughs. At each stop over the next two days George spoke appropriately about each of these aspects of the Burren.

This was well illustrated at Poll Salach where fossils of corals and branchiopods, plainly visible on the limestone, were formed c.350 million years ago when the Burren was covered by a tropical sea teeming with life. Here also we saw the glacial striations left after the last ice age which, due to water solution, have developed into grikes in which the Maidenhair fern, *Adiantum capillas-veneris*, a subtropical plant can grow successfully. Thus we see, in juxtaposition, a subtropical plant and a short distance away the mountain avens, *Dryas octopetala* which grows in the Arctic. The presence of erratics of Galway granite combined with the north-south alignment of the striations were evidence of the glacial path.

On our visit to the Neolithic portal dolmen at Poul nabrone, the ruins of Corcomroe Cistercian Abbey, c.1195, and to the seventeenth century Leamaneh Castle, George took the opportunity to talk about the threats to these monuments from vandals or even from well meant but questionable conservation methods. At Poul nabrone where the O.P.W. fenced off the dolmen, long grasses choked the flora and controlled grazing had to be allowed. This emphasizes the importance of traditional farming methods to the survival of the habitat.



George Sevastopulo explains the mysteries of the Burren to a rapt audience. Photo: Tessa Dagge.

Lack of space compels me to omit the very long list of plants that with George's help we found in grikes, on pasture, in woodlands and beside those mysterious seasonal lakes - the turloughs. Just to mention one or two that especially impressed me: the turlough violet, *Viola septentrionalis*, whose name suggests its location; the dense-flowered orchid, *Neotinea maculata*; the flecked marsh orchid, *Dactylorhiza cruenta*, with leaves spotted on both sides; the large-flowered butterwort, *Pinguicula grandiflora*, a Lusitanian plant found here at its most northern limit but mingling with arctic and alpine plants; and finally, of course, the iconic blue gentian, *Gentiana verna*.

All of us, I think, would agree that we have had a most wonderful window opened to us on the Burren. For this we are deeply indebted to George.

Patricia McGeown

Visit to Anna Nolan's Garden

This much anticipated event which was scheduled for 17 June unfortunately had to be postponed owing to Anna's sudden illness. I'm sure you all join with me in wishing her a speedy recovery. (Ed.)

Fixtures

Thursday, 20 September, 8 pm, NBG, Glasnevin, Rod Saunders, *Cape Bulls*.

Thursday, 4 October, 8 pm, NBG, Glasnevin, **Panayoti Kelaidis**, *Denver Botanic Gardens: Botanical Gem of Western America*.

Saturday, 13 October, 2.15 for 2.30 pm, Guided Tour of **Mount Usher Gardens**, Ashford, Co. Wicklow. Admission €6.

Thursday, 8 November, 8 pm, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan, **Bob Gordon**, *Plants, Pleasure and Pains*.

Friday, 16 November to Sunday, 18 November, 23rd Alpine Weekend, Termonfeckin.

Thursday, 6 December, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan, **Carl Dacus**, *Turkish Delights*.

Officers and Committee

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Fixtures Secretary: Martin Walsh

Committee: Jamie Chambers

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NOTES



Ireland's Farrer Medal Winners 2007

This newsletter is edited by Billy Moore who can be contacted at 32, Braemor Park, Dublin 14. Email: billymoor@gmail.com.

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