



Primroses

THE QUARTERLY OF THE AMERICAN PRIMROSE SOCIETY

WINTER 2010 | VOL. 68

No. 1



Primroses

*The Quarterly of the
American Primrose Society*

Volume 68 No 1

Winter 2010

The purpose of this Society is to bring the people interested in *Primula* together in an organization to increase the general knowledge of and interest in the collecting, growing, breeding, showing and using in the landscape and garden of the genus *Primula* in all its forms and to serve as a clearing house for collecting and disseminating information about *Primula*.

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Front Cover: *Primula 'Raynald'*, a sterile hybrid that originated at Frank Cabot's garden, Les Quatre Vents. Photo by Richard Brown.

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Editorial Deadlines
Winter issue - October 15
Spring issue - January 15
Summer issue - April 15
Autumn issue - July 15

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Color:
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Back Cover: \$450
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President's Message

ALAN LAWRENCE

Happy New Year to everyone! Hopefully 2010 will bring us all the blooming rewards our efforts deserve. This is my first President's message since taking on the job from Joe Philip when time pressure forced Joe to reduce his commitments. He is now concentrating on organizing the 2010 APS National Show, which is probably a full time activity in itself. Unfortunately, there are only 24 hours in a day, and many of us find that 24 hours are not quite enough. Now that I am retired I cannot imagine how I ever found time to go to work.

Winter is a busy time for me, and many of my primulas suffer because of our chosen lifestyle. We overwinter in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, as my wife and I are keen cross-country skiers. Here in the extreme western tip of the UP, the climate is modified by the vast thermal sink of Lake Superior, creating winters with reliable snow cover (locally over 200 inches per year) and summers with no excessive heat. This sounds like ideal *Primula* country, and I recently gave a talk to the local gardening club to try to spark some interest. Unfortunately for me, most of my primulas are at our home in South Central WI, 4 hours away at the excessive speed of my driving. I make this trip every 10 days or so, to check on all my plants and seedlings. This is when I often make that classic error of overwatering brought on by the paranoia of "I won't be here for 10 days or so." The resulting root or crown rot is not a pretty sight. I certainly would appreciate an expert article on "How to water your plants" in the quarterly.

The Seed Exchange has again provided a diverse and comprehensive selection of seeds of species and hybrids to tempt us to try something a little

different or something a little difficult. We all owe Jacques Mommens and his crew of able helpers a debt of gratitude for all the hard work they put into receiving, cleaning, sorting, packaging and distributing the great selection offered in the Seed Exchange. I usually try something new each year, often with only limited success due to the above mentioned winter neglect and overwatering. Last year I tried *Primula x kewensis* and now have half a dozen seedlings waiting for me to not overwater. I hope you have ordered a good selection for yourself.

Joe Philip will be show chairman for this year's National Show, and that means it will be another good one! Please plan to attend if you possibly can!

Best wishes for the 2010 Primula growing year!

Alan Lawrence



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...how do you deal with SLUGS?

The most common approaches seem to be:

- Watering schedule - watering in the evening leaves damp places overnight for slugs
- Seaweed - it is salty and rough when dry
- Copper - creates electric shocks in their slime!
- Predators - toads, beetles, birds and nematodes
- Hair clippings - sharp ends deter slugs
- Nighttime raids with a flashlight

However, there seems to be some controversy surrounding the following:

- Diatomaceous earth - can kill other beneficial insects
- Coffee - questionable results
- Salt - messy and can alter soil chemistry
- Beer or milk traps - also messy and can kill beneficial insects

The following websites may be of use in the springtime.

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A2876862>
- http://www.eartheasy.com/grow_nat_slug_cntrl.htm
- <http://www.cf.ac.uk/biosi/staffinfo/wocs2.html>
- <http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0700/slugs.asp>

As always, if you have any tips to pass on, we would be most grateful! Send them to: editor@americanprimrosesociety.org

Primula section Primula in the Caucasus region.

JOHN RICHARDS

What is *Primula* section *Primula*? Well, it is the group of species (there are only seven) which used to be known as the Vernales, and include such familiar plants as the primrose, *P. vulgaris*, the cowslip, *P. veris* and the oxlip, *P. elatior*. More than 40 years ago, the “plant lawyers” who meet every four years to dream up rules governing plant names, decided in their wisdom that the group (section, subgenus, whatever) that contains the type species of the genus should have the same name as the genus. No-one doubts that the type species of *Primula* is the cowslip, *P. veris*, and so we have to call the ‘Vernales’ *Primula*, the same as the genus. Sorry!

I am lucky enough to live in an area of northern England where primroses and cowslips are common native plants, and so spring is a season we await eagerly! But we have only two members of the section native here, and some of the others are quite hard to cultivate. Nevertheless, most forms of oxlip (not the purple ones!) are also hearty growers here, although as a native plant it is restricted in the UK to a tiny area of eastern England. Oxlips are much more common in parts of Europe. We saw drifts, often emerging from the melting snow, in the Dolomites this summer.

These three species are very widespread, spreading eastwards to Iran in the case of the primrose, to central Siberia

for the oxlip, and cowslips are native almost as far east as the Pacific. This is a very “Eurocentric” viewpoint! As I have explained in my book *Primula* (2003), the genus almost certainly first diversified in the eastern Sinohimalaya, so it is very likely that the forerunners of this group actually spread westwards into Europe.

In Geographical Botany, there is an old concept, first put forward by Willis, of *Age and Area*. This says that the most widespread species tend to be the oldest, and that regions with the greatest diversity of species may well be those in which the group evolved. Although this theory does not always hold true, there is no argument as to where the centre of origin might be for section *Primula*! The other four species in the group, *P. megaseifolia*, *P. juliae*, *P. renifolia* and *P. grandis* only occur in the Caucasus region (including north-eastern Turkey), and all the widespread species occur there too, and in an amazing array of local forms not seen elsewhere. Nearly all the biodiversity exhibited by these far-flung plants is crammed into this tiny, politically chaotic corner of the world. We will never know for certain, but surely this is where section *Primula* first diversified, later to migrate westwards into Europe.

Primula megaseifolia is very localised in steep wooded valleys near the

Black Sea, although it is found in both Turkey and Georgia. This is a very wet region, and the habitat is often shaded, for instance under rhododendrons, although I have heard that it also can occur in open sites above the tree line, where it may overwinter under deep snow. Nevertheless, it is not very hardy. The round leathery leaves are only produced once a year, after flowering, and can be severely damaged by sudden frosts, or temperatures below about -5C. With us it is best grown in shade on the humid floor of the glasshouse, watered regularly, and repotted and divided into a leaf-mould-rich compost after flowering. There are some great hybrids (with the next species) called 'John Fielding' and 'Barbara Midwinter'.

Primula juliae is a little sweetie, one of my favourite species. I wonder if the Russian lady Professor of Botany, Julia Mlokoševič, who discovered it and the yellow Caucasian peony, both of which are named for her, was half as charming? It occurs in forests on mossy rocks by tumbling mountain rivers in the far eastern Caucasus, split between Daghestan and Azerbaijan. I find it rather too delicate for the rough and tumble of the garden, and it dislikes my pots, but I can keep it going in shady troughs which are best not covered in winter. It loses its leaves and disappears to a cluster of reddish nubbles in winter, but creeps around and is easily propagated. It is fully hardy here (zone 8-ish), but I guess would not go below 7. It has been a wonderful parent of course, but I don't think that any of the "later Wandas" (the original passed

away many years since) are its equal. I am a species snob!

Primula renifolia is one of the most desirable and sought-after of all primulas. It comes from wet subalpine regions, often growing near waterfalls, in a tiny area near Dombai (Teberda valley) in the north-western Caucasus. In happier times tourists used to visit this area, but I never heard of it being seen by a westerner, and the few plants previously in Western cultivation came from a Botanic garden. Perhaps because only a thrum clone was grown with us it was never persuaded to set seed, and was finally lost. We keenly await a new introduction from this troubled region!

Primula grandis is a real oddity. The hanging clusters of lemon flowers from one-meter-high stems are just a tube, with no petal-limb. This caused many authors to put it in another genus, *Sredinskya*. However, look at the leaves and it is no surprise that the DNA puts it, not only in *Primula*, but bang in the centre of the *Primula* section. This is another western Caucasian, but is much more widespread, occurring through much of the western Caucasus, mostly to the south of the watershed. It is a plant of wet meadows and stream edges, growing in much the sort of site in which the Candelabras thrive. I can grow it here in northern England, but it sulks without fresh soil and very wet conditions while in growth.

In the Caucasus, primroses, *P. vulgaris*, are usually pink or even purple-flowered, occasionally white. They

tend to have a more marked stalk to the leaf than yellow-flowered plants, and are greyish-hairy underneath. They are called subsp. *sibthorpii*, after the 18th Century Oxford Professor. They occur sporadically as far west as Greece, where Sibthorp travelled. However, as you approach the Georgia border along the southern coast of the Black Sea, there is a marked change in the primroses. Hybridization between the western 'yellows' and the eastern 'reds' (!) in the overlap zone has spawned a huge range of lovely plants which caused Russian taxonomists to create several new names, *P. komarovii*, *woronowii*, *abschastica*, but they are all primroses! We owe subsp. *sibthorpii* a huge debt for lending its reds and purples to the polyanthus and their garden kin. But the wild plant is a lovely thing, and thrives in our garden. We grow several clones and get seedlings.

Caucasus cowslips are not very exciting, although you get the large-flowered, baggy-calyxed *P. veris* subsp. *macrocalyx* here, as well as more normal ones, and, in north-east Turkey the elegant *P. veris* subsp. *columnae* with white-backed leaves.

However, oxlips have really gone to town in the Caucasus region. My favourite is *P. elatior* subsp. *pseudoelatior*, a long-lived dwarf clumping plant which disappears in winter, and is just perfect for exhibition! It is very vigorous here. Subspecies *leucophylla* is not as easy here and may be more of an alpine. It also disappears, but when the flowers jump up in spring, they often do so

before the leaves, like many bulbs! Most elegant is subsp. *cordifolia* with its neatly hairy bronzy leaves which make such a contrast to the luminous flowers. I struggled with it here and could only manage it in a pot. At least equally difficult here are the lovely purple to lilac forms, which are lumped as subsp. *meyeri*. Again, the Russians split, creating *P. amoena*, *P. kusnetsovii* and *P. meyeri*. They are plainly all oxlips, and are interfertile with the yellow ones, but they are true alpins, which may explain their intractability with us. I can grow them amongst my petiolarids, but they don't flower well!



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Some Primulas of Central Asia

PANAYOTI KELAIDIS AND MICHAEL BONE

Central Asia covers a vast swath of the earth's surface. Having spent a mere three weeks there this past summer, we would feel a bit self-conscious submitting this article to *Primroses* if we hadn't searched various archives and Googled to our heart's content and found practically no pictures and little information available about the areas we traveled and the primroses we encountered there.

Our field guide was Vladimir Kolbintsev, who has been leading tours through Kazakhstan for the better part of two decades. His mastery of the fauna as well as flora—not to mention his ebullience and good spirits—made this trip particularly enjoyable.

The Altai Mountains are in the very heart of Asia, equidistant from four oceans: Arctic, Indian, Atlantic and Pacific. Coming as we do from the heart of America, we should not have been surprised that the steppes, deserts and mountains of Central Asia reminded us of home in Colorado.

Like the Rocky Mountains we are so familiar with, the Altai Mountains consist of numerous ranges—one reference listed 47 distinct ranges, mostly tending east-west whereas the Rockies generally tend north-south. Much like the Rockies, the montaine and alpine heights of the Altai are

separated from one another by steppe or even desert-like parkland that has effectively isolated the mountain flora into floristic islands; each range is a bit different from the neighboring range. One of the reasons we were interested in exploring these mountains was that they closely resemble the Rocky Mountains in their flora.

Our trip to Kazakhstan began and ended by the Tien Shan in the former capital of Kazakhstan, the very modern city of Almaty. After a very short night, we departed the next day for Ust Kamenegorsk, the easternmost sizable city in Kazakhstan, where we met our guides and the vehicle that we used for most of our travel over the next two weeks. Kazakhstan encompasses roughly the west central slice of the Altai consisting of ten distinct ranges. We traversed four of these in the course of two weeks. The last half of June is the very peak of the alpine spring in this region, and the floral displays were lavish and panoramic.

It is perhaps important to stress at this point that the *Primula* genus is not hugely represented here, considering the size and extent of the Altai Mountains. The flora at montaine and alpine levels is holarctic; most of the higher elevation plants are either identical or closely related to species found in the Alps or much of North America. The

foothills, however, and intervening valleys are filled with plants of a more southerly affinity. This region is isolated enough from the Himalayas and other ranges that many of the *Primula* genus members are distinct at the species level.

The first *Primula* we encountered was *Primula veris*, very similar to what passes under this name in Europe. This occurred in open montaine forests of *Pinus sibirica* and *Larix sibirica*, alongside familiar garden classics like *Bergenia crassifolia* and *Corydalis nobilis*, in the same edge of forest and meadow environments where we have seen cowslips in Europe.

The next *Primula* we encountered turned out to be classic *Primula nivalis* growing in the middle of a turbulent subalpine stream alongside the very rugged road. Several frantic participants risked serious injury crossing the slippery current to get close enough to photograph what turned out to be a rather mediocre specimen in partial bloom. It is really just an outlier this low in the Siberian pine forest area. Very much like *Primula parryi* (which it resembles closely), *Primula nivalis* can occur along streams in the subalpine, although it is much more abundant in the big, soggy snowmelt well above treeline.

We'd been driving from Katom Karagai to our first campsite near Rachmanovski Springs, a Soviet era resort featuring radioactive water used in special spa treatments for special

medical conditions. The prospect of a good soaking was almost irresistible at this point on our trip, but the springs' radioactive properties were worrisome. We soon discovered the spa was by doctor's prescription only! We were spared a good wash, and likely a good dose of carcinogenesis. A campground nearby was to be our staging ground to finally get above tree line.

Possibly our most enchanting day in the Kazakhstan Altai was when we climbed Burhat Pass, within site of Rachmanovski springs. We lingered so long on this steep, beautiful slope taking pictures of the dozens of spectacular alpine that by the time we reached the summit of the pass, the top half of Mt. Belukha some 20 miles away was obscured in cloud. The twin peaks of this highest mountain of both Siberia and the Altai Mountains reaches 14,784 feet. We are at the latitude of Southern Canada, so the massive glaciation of this mountain would be truly awe inspiring on a clear day. Knowing this, we would have climbed more quickly up to the pass, and lingered on the slopes on the way back to take pictures!

The highlight on the pass was finding *Primula nivalis* in huge drifts growing with a bright buttercup in the soggy snowmelt. It was uncannily similar superficially to *Primula parryi*, although these are clearly in different sections of the genus when it comes to less visible details of their morphology. Most of the plants were the lavender-magenta so common in the section, although a single albino was very popular on this

trek, photographed sequentially by everyone with a camera.

We spent several more days in the vicinity, and we did find *Primula algida* in quite a few different sites. It was rather sparsely distributed on tundra in this part of the Altai, but in one broad river valley it grew by the thousands much as one sees *Primula incana* in the Rockies or *Primula farinosa* in the Alps. Its commonest neighbor here was the bright purple *Dactylorhiza umbrosa*, a gorgeous orchid similar to many common meadow orchids found in the Alps and elsewhere in Eurasia. On drier spots nearby, *Orostachys spinosa* grew almost like a groundcover. I hope this fabulous meadow will be preserved.

We ended this leg of the Kazakhstan Altai exploration by returning to Urst Kamenogorsk and flying across the length of the entire Altai mountain ranges to Westernmost Mongolia, landing in the small town of Olgii (also called Bayan Olgii). This part of Mongolia is inhabited primarily by nomadic Kazakh and Tuvan peoples, who both speak Turkic languages. As in Kazakhstan, we had to travel in rugged vehicles for several hours (nearly 100 miles) to reach our base camp in the Altai Mountains very near the borders of China, Russia and Mongolia.

The steppe landscape between Olgii and the base camp was incredibly heavily impacted by overgrazing: the only plants that rose more than a few centimeters above the ground level were either very spiny or otherwise poisonous or

unappetizing. It is apparent that the free range policies of traditionally nomadic Mongolia have led to catastrophic results. I have read that this vast country has little more than a hundred miles of official road. Once we left Olgii, the “road” consisted of an endless series of braided trails sometimes half a mile wide; you simply drove wherever you wished. Needless to say, this sort of land use was very disheartening. After a few hours drive we came to moister, more montaine vegetation, and stopped for lunch alongside an extremely lush meadow (albeit cropped to goat’s tooth height). The meadow was studded with tens of thousands of *Primula nutans*, a lovely miniature in the Aleuritia section with distinctively shaped flowers and relatively farinose-free foliage. I was especially pleased to find this lovely primrose since I have grown and loved *Primula nutans* Hort, now classified as *P. flaccida*, a stunning Himalayan. Its Central Asian usurper isn’t half bad! There were dozens of other miniature alpiners dotted among the *Primulas* including tiny alpine poppies (*Papaver radicum*) and dense cushions of *Glaux maritima*, another primrose relative with pale pink flowers forming dense tufts along streamsides. I’m amazed that a charming plant with such universal distribution in the Northern Hemisphere seems to be utterly absent from gardens, although I can see its spready habit could be a problem.

A very dramatic cluster of peaks forms the border between the three countries. We approached this range on two occasions, the first being a

very long hike above the tree line on our second day to view the Potanin Glacier (purportedly the largest of over 1000 glaciers in the Altai Mountains). We were fortunate to have a very comfortable, sunny day. The total hike was over 20 miles long, leading up to an overview of the Glacier, which rises at the point where three great nations meet. The panorama of snowy peaks and tundra stretching for miles in all directions, studded with gorgeous alpiners in full-bloom was something I shall not soon forget. I will be describing the full range of alpiners in articles elsewhere, but one of the showiest of the day was *Primula xanthobasis*. I should explain that the nomenclature of the nivalid *Primulas* is confusing at best: many recent treatments have lumped all three nivalids I found on

my trip as varieties of *Primula nivalis*. At one point or another, all have been described simply as *Primula nivalis*. *P. xanthobasis* grew in the same sort of habitats as *Primula nivalis* further west, but the golden meal on the undersurface of the leaves, and other details of the inflorescence and morphology suggest to me that it deserves at least subspecific recognition. For gardeners, they are both stunning and would be well worth growing, although I suspect these are only for people in very cool climates

The next day we began a trek that took us nearly 50 miles over the spine of the mountains into the Tsagaan Salaa river valley, an enchanted region that was minimally grazed, with huge lakes and dramatic peaks on the Chinese border where we were met by a vehicle to bring us back to Olgii. *Primula xanthobasis* grew by the tens of thousands on the summits of the mountains we crossed, and along streams down to the tree line: a primrose lover’s dream. *Androsace septentrionalis* and *Primula algida* were the only other Primulaceae we encountered on this trek, but there was a wealth of other alpiners. This area has some of the most concentrated prehistoric rock art in all of Asia which is featured in *Archaeology and Landscape in the Mongolian Altai: An Atlas* by Esther Jacobson-Tepfer and James E Meacham, to be published in late 2009. We visited one site with concentrated rock art featuring the rich fauna that once abounded in the region, but which has been largely replaced by goats and camels.



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Little did I suspect that after nearly three weeks in the Altai, my one day's drive in the Tien Shan above Almaty would be so exciting. Many hundred miles further west and also further south, the Tien Shan has a remarkable flora that seems to blend classic boreal alpine species with a large dose of Himalayan species and its own, distinctive endemics in a heady floristic mix. The rugged road, only a dozen or so miles long out of the capital, brought us well above tree line. The flowers along the way changed drastically every mile from the dry steppe vegetation bristling with foxtail lilies below to extremely cold heights with mythical alpine at the top. It would be hard to convey how exciting it was for a botanist/horticulturist to find wild apples and apricots for the first time in the foothills, and a few hours later to see cliffs encrusted with *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, the heavenly columbine ancestor, *Paraquilegia microphylla* and the lilac globeflower *Trollius lilacinus*, three among the many dozens of spectacular flowers in full bloom I encountered for the first time.

Primula algida was abundant throughout the alpine turf, growing alongside the tiny, nodding yellow *Tulipa heteropetala* and no end of strange plants. The plants here were larger and much more robust than those we found in the Altai, although this could have been due to the cooler, wetter environment. They almost looked like miniature *Primula denticulata*, although invariably with the vibrant pink coloration.

The prize of the Tien Shan, however, was the local nivalid: the spectacular *Primula turkestanica* grew only on the highest crags, sometimes nestled in scree or even crevices. We never encountered the stream habitat where nivalids grew so commonly in the Altai, although I suspect that had we done so, this gem would have grown enthusiastically there as well. The dozen or so specimens we encountered were all covered with golden meal on both surfaces of their leaves, and the flowers seemed especially large and showy. This stunning nivalid must rank as one of the most beautiful primroses and was a fitting end to a magical trip to the heart of Asia.



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Breeding Green- and Grey-Edged Auriculas: A Beginner's Tale Part One – Why?

DR DAVID MELLOR

“That is the essence of science: ask an impertinent question and you are on the way to a pertinent answer.”

*Jacob Bronowski,
The Ascent of Man, ch.4.*

This is the first in a short series of articles that gives what I fondly imagine to be a very personal insight into the world of raising new varieties of green- and grey-edged show auriculas. The approach that I have adopted is that of a detective story – each part in the series becomes a little deeper, a little more mysterious and certainly a little more forensic before the ending is revealed. I'm big on evidence, by the way. If someone advises me of the best way to go about something I always want to know “why” and “show me the evidence”. It has led me to some pretty interesting places over the years.

I live in the English Lake District where the summers are cool, wet and windy and the winters are not a lot different: maybe cooler, windier and wetter. Ideal conditions for growing auriculas. I started growing them about ten years ago, along with a variety of *Primulas* and *Lewisias*. Gradually, I expanded my interest into auriculas and

sold my *Primulas* and *Lewisias* to other collectors. The bug had well and truly bitten.

The addiction affects different people in different ways. Although I have been a member of the Northern Section of the National Auricula and Primula Society (NAPS) for around five years, I had never really made the effort to attend any shows. Consequently, for quite a while, I knew few other people who grew these special plants. In 2008 I decided that this had to change – I would get out to the shows, meet people and (eventually) exhibit my plants. I joined the other two Sections of NAPS, attended as many shows as possible and – I'm pleased to say, made lots of friends in the process. Which really brings me to the start of the story.

I made all the typical beginner's decisions (AKA “mistakes”). I bought practically any auricula that came my way, regardless of whether or not it was up to show quality. I tended to love them for their own sake, not caring a fig whether they were of prize-winning, thoroughbred stock. I don't regret this since it gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the growing requirements of a very wide and varied range of auriculas over a few short

years. But, as experience is gained, it seems natural to want to reduce the numbers of older, “beginner’s” plants and focus a wee bit more on the show-stoppers. And that’s where I ran into my first problem, one that may be all too familiar to North American growers: how, exactly, do you get the very best varieties – the rare, the much sought-after and hugely in-demand ones? Nurseries generally don’t have them. You have to have friends in high places and attend all the plant sales at the NAPS shows. But there is another way. There always is, of course. Raise your own from seed!

To be scrupulously fair, it isn’t really an *alternative* way, more of an *additional* way – another string to your bow. And what a string! Not only is it great fun in its own right, but should you succeed against all the odds you will have tremendous satisfaction, and some admired and much sought-after varieties to give names to. That seems motivation enough, to my way of thinking. And every good detective story needs to address motivation, doesn’t it?

With that in mind I started raising seed from one or two tentatively made crosses a few years ago. I have to say that, looking back (and at the very patchy results) I was unfocussed, unsystematic and, unsurprisingly, unsuccessful. Yet again, something had to change. I would cut out the crossing stage altogether and obtain seed from the NAPS seed exchange schemes. Good decision. Bad timing.

But despite my late application to the 2008/09 schemes, all three Sections provided me with packets of seeds. What an impact that had on me. In February 2009 I followed the guidance kindly provided with the seeds and sowed the lot. The germination rate was pretty good; by mid April most seed trays had at least some tiny green leaves rising up from the surface of the compost. I was enthralled - and hooked again (only deeper, somehow).

But now a new problem hove into view – my auriculas were almost all in bud and about to flower. Having seen firsthand that auricula seeds will actually germinate in large numbers (seeing truly is believing), I suddenly had to decide what my breeding objectives might be and make some wise choices of parents.

I liked the new problem very much. Although I’m now retired, my background is in industrial research (mainly oil exploration). I’m used to reading up as much as possible and “doing the theory” before committing to practical experiments, under pressure, generally. I decided upon a lofty ambition – I would raise some new green-edged shows and some new grey-edged shows. Oh, and maybe I might try one or two selfs as well, but mainly the edges. Breeding Objective nailed. What about the parents? Are there any recognized, reliable methods of selecting parents to breed from?

To address the knotty problem of picking parents that might produce

winners I promptly read every book and article on the subject. Then I fired off a few grovelling e-mails to established experts in the field requesting tips, guidance and – well, anything they might think to be worth knowing, really. Slight additional complication. Having hitherto made no effort to mix in the excellent society of florists, I didn’t actually know any experts. Not one. However, it was easy to identify them from the NAPS *Yearbooks*, textbooks and published articles. Unashamedly I contacted most of the “Great Men of Edges” by e-mail – cold calling style. (Funny that – why are there not more women raising edges?) Thankfully, all responded and none objected to being contacted out of the blue by some unheard-of novice.

When all the advice, recommendations, tips, hints and how-to chapters and articles had been digested, two prominent trends emerged. Firstly, the concepts of genetics and lineage were notable by their near total absence. As far as breeding new varieties is concerned, such references as exist in books can be summed up as “hard to understand” and “of no real relevance to the task at hand”. Secondly, there was a strong consensus against the dark practice of crossing green-edges with grey-edges which threatened, at the very least, to rip the fabric of the space-time continuum if practiced by mere beginners. Hmmm....

Well, that set me to thinking. More accurately, it set me to questioning – why are genetics not held to be all

that useful by auricula breeders? Why should we not cross greens with greys? What happens if we do?

I decided that the answer to the first question might be straightforward – there are no published works that present basic genetic theory alongside practical tips on auricula hybridizing. This is understandable as the auricula world is not that large and there may be few geneticists within it and fewer still willing to write about it. But, I reasoned, it doesn’t necessarily follow from this that the subject has nothing to offer. It’s just that it’s a bit of a blank canvas waiting to be filled at the present time.

The second question really intrigued me. I knew the standard answer, the conventional wisdom. This is that if a green-edge is crossed with a grey-edge, one of the resulting seedlings might well be a green-edge. But, such a green-edge will tend to have a smattering of meal (farina) along the edge of the pips (petals) and possibly across the face of the petals themselves. The thinking is that such a green-edge carries with it undesirable traces of meal inherited from the grey-edged parent. Exhibition judges recognise this meal-edging (also called “China Edge”) as a fault which marks the plant down compared to one that doesn’t have it. Consequently, breeders of edges reckon the risks of such a mixed marriage to be not worth taking. Which begs the third and final question – what happens if you do?

It’s in the tradition of a detective novel

that the author ends a chapter with some cliff-hanging, dramatic situation that makes the reader want to get to the next instalment as fast as possible to find out what happens next. At the same time, it is also traditional to scatter a couple of clues around to link to the next part. Well, it should come as no surprise that I decided that I had to invest a sizeable chunk of time becoming a bit more knowledgeable about genetics. It helps that my wife has a master's degree in Evolution, Variation and Taxonomy – or genetics for short. Well, we'd happily while away the winter evenings chatting about this gene and that gene until she'd say "I think it's time I walked the dog, dear". I knew this was her way of telling me she'd had enough of auricula genetics for a while – we don't have a dog.

This four-part series will continue in the next issue. If you simply cannot wait, you may email the editor (editor@americanprimrosesociety.org) for an email copy of the next three installments.



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Green-edged Beauties!

*Beechen Green, Serenity and
Fleminghouse are some of the
older green-edged auriculas often
available in North American that
could be used for breeding.*

SEE ARTICLE PAGE 13

Clockwise from top: Beechen Green (photo in Brenda Hyatt's book *Auriculas* - originally provided by Mr. P. Talboys), Serenity (photo by NAPS Northern), Fleminghouse (photo by David Hadfield). Photos courtesy of Bob Taylor





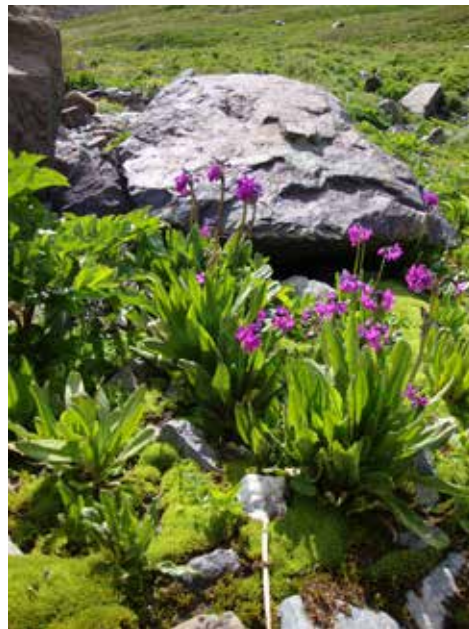
Primula section
Primula in the Caucasus region.

JOHN RICHARDS

SEE ARTICLE PAGE 5



Facing page, top: *Primula renifolia*. Bottom: *Primula juliae*. This page, top: *Primula grandis*. Bottom: *Primula sibthorpii*.
All Photos: John Richards



Some Primulas of Central Asia

PANAYOTI KELAIDIS AND MICHAEL BONE

SEE ARTICLE PAGE 8

Facing page:
Top left:
Primula algida from Tian Shen.
Top right and bottom:
three examples of *Primula xanthobasis* from Mongolia.

This page:
Top:
Primula nutans from Mongolia.
Middle:
Primula xanthobasis.
Bottom right:
Primula turkestanica from Tian Shen.

All Photos: Panayoti Kelaidis

A Plethora of Primulas

FRANK CABOT

SEE ARTICLE PAGE 25



Facing page: Top left: *Primula vulgaris* ssp. *sibthorpii* with *P.* 'Wanda'. Top Right: A corner of the woodland garden with *Primula japonica*. Bottom: Candelabra primroses.

This Page: Top: *Primula* 'Johanna' by a woodland pond. Bottom Left: A woodland stream runs through a clearing filled with primulas. Bottom Right: A view of the house from the *Perennial Allée*

Text and photos provided for reproduction by designer Susan McClan and Hortus Press with the kind permission of Frank Cabot. All Photos: Richard Brown



An Abiding Affection for Primroses

SEE ARTICLE PAGE 34

“At the end of the counter you could pick up a trowel and open a container and scoop up a quantity of lively Primroses complete with roots and soil.”

Yellow Jack-in-the-Green, red three-year-old primrose, blue Phlox divaricata, by Vin Sette.

A Plethora of Primulas

FRANK CABOT

Frank Cabot, a long time APS member and kind supporter of the Society has created a magnificent garden at his property in Les Quatre Vents in Charlevoix, Quebec. Drifts of Primula bloom throughout the season from early spring until full summer glory. His book about creating the garden The Greater Perfection (Hortus Press, NY, 2001) received the American Horticultural Society Award in 2002 and the Literature Award from the Council of Botanical and Horticultural Libraries in 2003. We are fortunate to be able to include excerpt of Chapter 11 devoted to how our favorite plant, the Primula were woven into the structure of the woodland garden.

every year. In fact it is a good idea to sow many of the perennial species as well, to be sure that the colonies and drifts are kept well upholstered. Working out the bloom cycle of the primulas in the Woodland to achieve continuous and harmonious color has been an agreeable and challenging pastime. For the most part we've chosen to separate the color variations within a species and to mass a given color for effect, in the belief that the visual impact will be more satisfying. At the same time we have planted each of the five streams with its own distinctive group of *primulas* that follow in succession.

Primula species are divided into a number of sections. The blossoms of the Oreophlomis section follow close on the heels of the Petiolarids. Up until recently the Oreophlomis section was known as Farinosa subsection auriculata, which helped a lot since *P. auriculata* is indigenous to the Caucasus and our few plants came from a specimen collected on the slopes of Mount Elbruz, the highest of those dramatic mountains. What's more, the flowers of *P. auriculata's* kindred Asiatic species, *P. rosea*, *clarkei*, and the tongue-twisting *warshenewskyana* are very similar. These, along with their vigorous and wonderfully easy hybrids, 'Peter Klein', and 'Johanna', cheerily illuminate the Woodland with sheets of pink shading to red for several weeks in May, sharing the stage with the

A Plethora of Primulas

Most of all there are *primulas* – so many of them that the Woodland Garden could really almost be called a Primula Garden. The different species bloom in waves from the first of May, just as the snow is melting and *P. whitei* and *P. sonchifolia* (the two petiolarid species from the Himalayas that have survived to date in Charlevoix) shyly show their delicate blue blossoms, to September when the monocarpic *P. capitata* and *P. glomerata* display their round whirls of attractive dark blue florets. While most of the species are thoroughly perennial, a few, in Charlevoix at least, vanish after they have flowered. As a matter of course we sow these short-lived species

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drumstick primula, *P. denticulata*.

While trekking in Central Nepal with Tony Schilling in 1983, we walked for two days up and down alpine meadows at the 10,000 foot level which were covered with *P. denticulata*, in every color from white to the darkest purple. There were thousands of them and they looked like a sea of lollipops, with small globular heads, at the most six inches high. In cultivation in Charlevoix this amenable species grows into great multi-stalked, cabbagey clumps with drumheads that could serve only for the largest of base drums. They couldn't be showier or easier but that charming elfin quality, so evident in the wild, is nowhere in evidence. Also, unless they are dead-headed before they set seed, they will spread throughout the garden with a vengeance.

The southernmost of the five streams in the Woodland flows from a little pond flanked by drifts of 'Johanna' and 'Peter Klein' through a narrow, fifty-foot swath of *P. denticulata*, occasionally intermingled with *P. rosea*. The denticulata are segregated by color, the whites at the upper end, then the good blues, shading through lavender and mauve to the darkest forms.

The last of the oreophlomis section to bloom is *P. luteola*, from the wet alpine meadows of Daghestan. Its configuration shows little kinship to its smaller pink-flowered cousins, as far as those of us who are not taxonomists can determine. Its yellow blossoms coincide with the emergence of the fresh green leaves of the deciduous

trees bringing shade to the Woodland, and conclude the first wave of bloom. By mid-May the Woodland is filled with the blossoms of anemone, cardamine, and erythronium. Low blue carpets of *Primula frondosa* and its section mates (*P. darialica*, *modesta*, the choice *farinosa*, and the diminutive, indigenous *P. laurentaiana* and *mistassinica*) appear just in time to complement the tail end of *warshenewskyana*'s extended blossoming. The pale yellow blossoms of *P. elatior*, the oxlip, follow. The easiest of the genus, like *P. denticulate*, it has to be dead-headed to prevent indiscriminate seeding. Being a fan of pale yellow, as opposed to the richer variety, in the garden, I've chosen to suppress *P. veris*, the cowslip. Not one to be put down, a specimen has chosen to establish itself in the front lawn where, surrounded by a sea of green, it fits in well with the dandelions and doesn't clash with its neighbors. Carefully nurtured and avoided by the boy who cuts the lawn, it grows into a larger clump year by year.

Questions of color

Back in the Woodland, *P. chionantha*, now including species that used to be known as *sinopurpurea* and *melanops* (recently relegated to sub-speciesdom by John Richards), takes over the bloom cycle in conjunction with the wonderful jumble of *P. ioessa* and *waltonii* hybrids. *Primula ioessa* has a distinctive cowbell-shaped blossom and its hybrids come in a wide range of colors. I tend to separate a *Primula* genus by color rather than letting the colony become a random mix, in

this case favoring the light duff and pale madder *ioessa* hybrids. *Primula waltonii* hybrids display an even wider color range and I am slowly endeavoring to build masses of the yellow, red, and dark madder forms.

In June there is an explosion of *primulas* as the month unfolds – *P. bulleyana*, *cockburniana*, and *alpicola* in its violet, pale yellow, and white forms. *Primula cernua*'s delicate blue spires complement the scented *P. alpicola* blossoms. Our plants originated from seeds collected in the valley at 12,500 feet below the great 21,000 foot pyramid of Sigunian-Shan in Western Szechuan. It doesn't persist, once it has bloomed, and has to be germinated regularly – but there are worse chores, given the results. *Primula flaccida*, another charmer, and the diminutive *P. reidii* var. *williamsii* behave in much the same manner.

Then comes the stately, if scentless, *P. prolifera* (helodoxa) along with *P. secundiflora* and *sikkimensis* followed by the candelabras: *P. japonica*, *aurantiaca*, *burmanica*, *poissonii*, and *pulverulenta* (including its Bartley Hybrids). The easy *P. japonica* tends to self-sow as readily as *P. denticulata* and, if not watched, a clump of a solid color such as 'Postford White' or 'Miller's Crimson', or a good clear pink or brick red, will turn into a kaleidoscope of color. *P. sieboldii* is even worse. While it can become a useful groundcover with persistent division, it is one of the most variable plants extant, with hundreds of variations in flower size, shape, petal form, and color. The Japanese, who grow most of their plants in pots given

their limited space for gardens, have a society for this species, the Sakurasoh. So far they have risen to the challenge of naming the constantly increasing number of forms that appear. I use massed plantings of white and pale pink varieties in the Woodland and, since the species has a tendency towards magenta, have planted the rest in the magenta corner.

The two flower colors that I find indigestible are magenta and orange, which many good and vigorous plants flaunt shamelessly – I suppose they attract the pollinating insects more effectively, much as the lurid and ubiquitous MacDonald's arches lure us to try their fastest of foods – but, to date, I've been unable to accept these colors in association with anything other than green or white. The solution has been to reserve corners of the Woodland to which plants sporting the offending colors can be relegated, and where they are surrounded entirely by green and accompanied, occasionally, by white. There is an area near the Gazebo by the second rope bridge, as one approaches the Machiai, that is filled with the orange blossoms of *Trollius ledebourii*, *Lilium hansonii*, tiger lilies, and all those lilies that were supposed to be red when ordered but turned out to be orange. There is a corresponding area in a southeast corner of the Woodland which is the repository for all the magenta *primulas*, not only the myriad forms of *P. sieboldii*, but *P. cortusoides*, *gemmaifera*, *heucherifolia*, *kisoana*, the lurid *P. polyneura*, and *saxatilis* as well, along with *Cortusa matthioli* and its ssp. *pekinensis*. I have no problem

with magenta en masse as long as it is isolated. The white forms of some of these species, such as *P. kisoana* 'Alba' and *Cortusa matthioli* 'Alba', are used elsewhere in the Woodland.

There are a few exceptions. The delicate, tiered, pale orange whirls of *P. cockburniana*, following closely on the heels of the yellow blossoms of *P. bulleyana*, seem to know their place and blend readily with the rest of the clan, as do the light orange-duff candelabras of *P. aurantiaca*, the purplish candelabras of *P. poissonii*, and the small purplish blossoms of *P. secundiflora*, whose name signifies that the flowers are clustered on one side of the stalk.

Slowly the preferred colors – where there is a variation within a species – are being encouraged. This involves hours of crawling about and marking the different color forms so that the rearrangement can proceed once the bloom is finished and they can be divided. The different scents of *P. alpicola*, *ioessa*, and *waltonii* make this a pleasant chore. Inter-specific hybrids that have resulted from the assemblage of so many species of this promiscuous genus, many of them self-sterile, appear regularly. This natural consequence of cohabitation (does it account for the derivation of the "Primrose Path?") adds a kaleidoscope of color to corners of the Woodland as in the finale of a fireworks display. It isn't the finale, however, because there is the dark red of the choice *P. anisodora* to follow and the emergence on the scene of *P. florindae*, the most durable of all the *primulas* in the Woodland.

This stately *primula* was discovered by Kingdon Ward in the Tsangpo Basin of southeastern Tibet in 1926, where it grew and hybridized with its Sikkimensis section cousins, *P. alpicola*, and *waltonii*. He named it after his wife, Florence. In Charlevoix, *P. florindae* is in bloom in July and August and appears to be indestructible. It has a tendency to colonize and naturalize, hybridizing readily with its section mates and appearing in a color range from pale yellow through russet to darkest red. We separate the three categories of colors so that the pale yellow form, the true *P. florindae*, follows one stream to the lip of the Ravine, the variants encompassing the russet shades surround a pool in the middle of the Woodland and follow the stream that flows from it, while the handsome, dark red variants line the banks of a third stream.

In the early 1990s a sterile hybrid, almost certainly a cross with *P. alpicola*, appeared in an entirely new color, a pinkish maroon with a dusky fawn interior. After frequent division it is now spread along a fourth stream, in this instance the denticulata/rosea stream which also features clusters of the very pale yellow *P. alpicola* var. *luna* that are over by the time the new hybrid begins to flower. The hybrid is being registered with the Nomenclature Authorities as *Primula* 'Raynald' after Raynald Bergeron who works with me in the garden and who first noticed that the single specimen was different. The Woodland during the *florindae* season is filled with scent, especially at twilight on a still, damp evening. It

is the apotheosis of the *primula* year. Long, narrow sweeps of color run through the garden as summer turns the corner. The clear days, golden evenings and cool nights of August follow. The tall, handsome, dark purple blossoms of *P. capitata* and *glomerata* complete the *primula* tableau into September, blooming so late that we never seem to be able to gather ripe seed before the winter sets in. The *primulas* are divided in August, the Woodland soil amended where necessary and the vision of what the next season will bring, if the winter snow cover comes early and stays late, is filed away in the memory bank to sustain us until the following May.



New book on Auriculas

There is a gorgeous new book on auriculas by Allan Guest – called *The Auricula* (Garden Art Press, 2009). It is available from Amazon Books online. More than half the book is an alphabetical dictionary of the current named plants in Britain, with a picture and information about the plant. The most interesting thing about this book, which includes a history of the auricula, along with cultivation information, is that it lists many of the recently introduced striped auriculas. It's a very handsome and useful book – maybe a special treat for yourself?

Treats for the Soul

If you need some wonderful colorful pictures of auriculas and primulas to cheer you up in the winter doldrums, have a look at Derek Salt's new website. Derek has introduced many new double auriculas over the past few decades and is now focusing on striped doubles. It is a feast for the eyes! You can find this at: <http://freespace.virgin.net/robert.wilkinson47/index.htm>

With Sadness

It is with sadness that we report that Harry Lill passed away in late November, 2009. He was a long time and valued member of the NAPS Northern Section and did the seed exchange for them for many years. He will be missed by many auricula friends.

Chapter reports 2009

Tacoma Chapter

Tacoma Chapter voted to again continue with APS after this decision was put to the members. Communication is limited as the meetings and agenda are posted on line and we don't have computer access.

The Chapter meets at Candy Strickland's house the fourth Thursday of the month except November, December, July and August. Some of the members of the group are ill and the Thanksgiving/Christmas potluck will not be held this year. Though we don't have many members we have a lively lunch and enjoy our meetings.

We lost two of our members this year: Gordon Lymburne and Louise Feneli. Both had been long time members and despite ill health were still interested in Chapter activities. They will both be sadly missed.

One of our members will speak at a Fuschia Society meeting on how to plant *Primula* seeds and care for the plants in the new year.

~Candy Strickland

New England Chapter

The New England Chapter held three special events this year, increased our membership, and created and mailed a late winter newsletter to all APS members.

During our midwinter meeting at the home of Matt Mattus and Joseph Philip

we made plans for hosting the National Show at Tower Hill in May. After a most enjoyable meal around the huge dining table, we held our business meeting to make decisions about advertising, presentations, tours, lodging and banquet options, activity scheduling and judging. Having completed the agenda, it was time to cross the snow to tour the greenhouse. Everyone welcomed the scents and sights of that warm weather garden in late January.

The first weekend in May brought very pleasant weather for the APS National Show at Tower Hill Botanical Garden in Boylston, Massachusetts. Garden tours, buffet and banquet dinners, benches filled with a fine selection of *Primulas*, and exciting guest speakers provided a memorable experience. David and Lynne Lawson, owners of Barnhaven Primroses in France, gave presentations, as did APS president Lee Nelson. David's photos of the facilities and special sales events at Barnhaven had us all wanting to fly to France. Lynne showed us how she pollinates the plants and prepares the seeds for sale and answered many questions about *Primula* cultivation.

October provided another luxury for *Primula* enthusiasts. Our Chapter invited members of the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS to share a presentation by Pam Eveleigh at The Berkshire Botanical Garden. Pam, who is well known to APS members as a previous web master for the APS site, and the owner of the Web site

PrimulaWorld, explained why the taxonomy of *Primulas* really does make sense. With her incredible photographs and straightforward examples, she delineated those differences in plant structure and function which cause *Primulas* to be placed in the various sections, and taught us to look at the plants and flowers in a new way.

Following Pam's presentation, we held a brief business meeting, during which we discussed a request from the Berkshire Botanical Garden that we plan and plant a small garden of *Primula* which their staff would subsequently maintain. The project is one which could provide an exciting challenge for 2010.

~ Co- Presidents Rodney Barker & Mark Dyen

Juneau Chapter

Just a brief note on Juneau primrose growers. We are about to begin winter meetings and decide the future of the Chapter with elections, programs, projects with local gardens and other business. It is likely that we will help support the Jensen Olsen Arboretum with our plants, labor, and finances. We will also assist the NE chapter with the National Show in 2010 however we can.

It was a great summer for gardeners - we even had to water during several dry spells! Perennials flowered beautifully, a productive berry crop fed birds, bears, and humans, and vegetable gardens were bountiful.

The growing season is nearly over but there are still *Primula capitata*

blooming here on November 11th! So far we've had a mild fall with only a few frosts and I still have hardy fuchsias blooming vigorously in pots - soon to be moved into my root cellar. The freezer is full, lots of dry wood stacked for the woodstove, and it's time to dream about spring.

~Ed Buyarski, President

B.C. Primula Group

The B.C. Primula Group meets every other month from Sept. to May. It was with great sadness that we learned that Roxanne Muth passed away in April. We have a loose organizational structure in our group, but Roxanne was more than our "secretary," though she was never called that formally. She kept us organized and kept us in touch with articles on *Primulas* from around the world. We will miss her greatly.

Due to illness and moving away of other members, our group is sometimes now only 5 or 6 members at a meeting, though we had over 10 members and spouses at the May meeting when Yvonne Rorison presented an interesting and beautiful selection of her pictures of the trip to China and Tibet in 2007. The program for the March meeting was on *P. juliae*, a compilation of information from books and articles, presented by Maedythe Martin.

The fall meeting in September was cancelled due to most members being unable to attend, and the program on the various mixes and potting mediums used by members for their range of *Primula* plants will likely be presented

in January. The November meeting was a great success with a good turn out (for us!) when Claire Cockcroft presented her recent survey of *Primula*, both in her garden and others and particularly from Steve Doonan's garden. The talk was compiled in honor of Steve Doonan, who passed away this spring. It was a successful meeting.

~Maedythe Martin

Doretta Klaber Chapter

The Doretta Klaber Chapter of the American Primrose Society had our spring meeting February 28 at the PHS Horticulture Center in Fairmount Park. Our speaker was Walt Cullerton of the Conifer Society on "Conifers for the Garden". Seeds from the APS and NARGS seed exchanges were passed out.

In April, two members opened their gardens for us so we could see their primroses. Unfortunately, it was one of the hottest days of the summer, at least 90°F. Our picnic on June 6 at the home of John Gyer had much cooler weather and had a good turnout. There were primroses and other plants available for sale, propagated from the seed passed out in February, or from member's gardens.

Our last meeting of the year was October 3, again at the Horticulture Center. Lee Nelson was the speaker on "Extending the Season" - many primroses were featured.

~Diana McCormack



*Would you
please let us
know how
they're doing?*

So many new seeds are sent out as part of the annual Seed Exchange that are never heard from again.

Would you be so kind as to let us know how those seeds are doing: how they germinated, what may be flourishing from previous years?

It is always helpful to get feedback on the process as well: did you donate, did your ordered seeds arrive quickly?

Thank you so much for your input!

In search of Abchasica

LEE NELSON

Sometime in the spring of 2009, I determined to find again a plant of *Primula abchasica*. In the mid 1970s, while attending my first APS meeting, I had the good fortune to meet Linc and Timmy Foster. The following spring I was invited to visit their garden in Connecticut. It was during that visit that I first saw *P. abchasica*. Image my delight when I came home with a division of this sturdy little *Primula*. Unfortunately, in the 1990s I lost it.

I knew Linc had shared *P. abchasica* with many friends, but it wasn't until I mentioned my plight to Maedythe Martin that I found a lead to someone that might have it. Maedythe emailed me that she had totally by chance, when looking for something else, come across the 1999 winter issue of the APS quarterly in which *P. abchasica* was featured.

I went to look in my set of old quarterlies – it is so handy having the set to refer to – and there it was! It even featured a picture of the plant on the cover. Eureka!

The authors, John and Janet Gyer in New Jersey gave an interesting and informative overview of the plant which comes from the Caucasus Mountains at the edge, where Europe meets Asia. Lincoln Foster had his plants and seeds originally from a Mrs. Artiushenko who traveled there on expeditions in 1957 and 1960. He multiplied the plant, dividing it and grew it very well until, in 1965, he had 86 plants! These were distributed widely through the American Primrose Society and the American Rock Garden Society.

I finally managed to contact John Gyer late this past summer (sadly Janet has passed away). Then I actually met John this fall, when I traveled to Philadelphia to give a lecture for the Dorretta Klaber chapter. John sent me stock of his *P. abchasica*, which came from the Winterthur estate in Delaware, where both he and Janet had served as volunteers. The plants, a gift from Linc to Mr. du Pont at Winterthur, were still growing in the quarry garden. John was not sure of the exact provenance of the plants he sent me. They could be from the original seed from Mrs. Artiushenko or the clone that Linc crossed with a white *P. vulgaris*.

I knew that Sydney Eddison, the noted garden writer, still has plants originally from Lincoln Foster. This spring Sydney will send me a division from her plant. I am also in contact with a person in Georgia (Russia) who may be able to send me fresh seeds next year.

This plant, although vigorous in growth, is very shy setting seed, so plants by division may be the only hope. If any APS member has or knows of someone that grows *P. abchasica*, I would love to hear from you. My goal is to establish the provenance of this plant, grow it on and share it with any of our members who might be interested in growing this enchanting little primrose.

Additional articles by Lincoln Foster about *P. abchasica* can be found in the APS Quarterly Summer 1965 pgs.90-91; Winter 1996 pgs.13-14

An Abiding Affection for Primroses

VINCENTE SETTE

I was born in Italy in Lombardy - the town of San Ponso Semola with a population of 350: a farming town situated in the mountain range called Alpinella - an area below the Swiss and Italian Alps. The house I was born in was 900 years old and now it approaches 1000. A pretty town with red clay roofs and stone buildings, upper stalls to house people and animals in the lower section. The town had no plumbing until the First WW. Dependent on water from a river and a brook which flowed through the town and served as a sewage system, it was rife with typhoid and TB. These medieval conditions were changed as people returned from the US and Argentina where over the years they had emigrated.

I have no recollection of the ocean trip, (to America, in 1914) but my first memory of leaving Italy was the farewell with an elderly neighbor who came knocking at my door to ask, "Shall we go pick flowers?" And so we did each morning - flowers from the meadows and from the mountains - heavy with chestnut groves and porcini mushrooms to flavor our Sunday dinner, which in the North of Italy consisted of polenta (cornmeal) with rabbit stew or risotto (rice) with a tiny bit of braised veal also with the fragrant mushrooms.

In the twenties, traffic on the side streets in Greenwich Village stopped in the

evenings, and we could jump double dutch in the gaslight. Eventually, our neighbor who lived in the opposite brownstone came out to scold us for disturbing her daughter -- who happened to be the poet, Edna St Vincent Millay. We lowered our voices, but kept jumping. That was on Morton Street.

It was years later that I fell in love with Primroses. I was visiting a friend with whom I frequently celebrated our birthdays by visiting one another's homes and families. We were shopping for dinner at a supermarket in an area outside Kopenhagen - slightly different from our markets - in Denmark they sold wine along with milk and soda. You provided your own shopping bags. At the end of the counter you could pick up a trowel and open a container and scoop up a quantity of lively Primroses complete with roots and soil. Placed in a plastic bag, home they went to be placed in a ceramic container with the existing soil from the purchase. The container was usually a swan or a duck. The height and length of the container lent itself to continued propagation. "When are they going into the garden?" I asked. "Oh, maybe tomorrow -- maybe," and so it was. Into the garden they went with the knowledge that there would be a continuous supply of Primroses. Not all went into the garden. Some were carried over in pots on windowsills in

bloom. There was an obconica that had wintered over for 3 years.

I decided at breakfast with the *Primulas* still on the table that we needed a trip to our aunt in Italy. We left that day - my husband and our friends to arrive by air (the tunnel across the Channel had not yet been built). In a few hours we arrived at San Ponso - I had never come early in the spring or late winter. Everywhere in the ditches along the road leading to the village of San Ponso there were blossoms of Primroses - mostly yellow. In the Alpine Primroses, there was some sign of pink. I was anxious to get to the woods. Bare of leaves, the chestnuts were dark in limb, the mountains were heavy with fallen leaves and the *Primula auricula* grew in mounds along the path. The area was delicately scented. I was in heaven. My aunt was happy to see us but thought we were a little deranged to make a trip for flowers, but we had a nice party with primroses on the table and good food, including some dried porcini mushrooms from the woods to flavour the risotto.

On another note, we learned that San Ponso was facing a crisis because of its antiquity and because it has an ancient Roman fort with slits to shoot arrows. Built as housing for the soldiers stationed to guard the approach to the mountain passes, it has been declared a National Monument which because it is only an hour's drive from Milano. It brings hordes of people driving through the mountains, picking mushrooms and shouting, "The woods belong to

everybody." The cars help destroy the roads and most of all, the farmers have to give up their customary Sunday dinner to stand guard with shotguns against the pilfering in their fruit orchards. Ah Woe!

Editor's note:

Vin Sette still demonstrates her passion for Primroses as a valued member of the APS and of the New England Chapter. Just this year, she painted a watercolor of some of the primroses she has grown from the APS Exchange, and sent a copy of it with the letter from which the above has been extracted. Vin lives in Millbrook, NY, and is looking forward to celebrating her 99th birthday in February.



John Richards at National Show

A very special event at this year's show will be a presentation by Dr. John Richards. He is the author of 'Primulas of The British Isles' (1989, Shire Publications Ltd., UK) and of 'Primula' (2nd edition from Timber Press, 2002) which has become the most important book on the genus in our time.

In addition to giving his presentation, which will be open to the public at Tower Hill, Dr. Richards has agreed to act as the facilitator for our Round Table discussion, when questions and answers will be the primary feature of an informal gathering.

American Primrose Society

Minutes of the Board Meeting held on November 1st, 2009

The meeting was held online and by telephone. It opened at 6:10 pm, Eastern Time.

Board members present: Linda Bailey (Director), Rodney Barker (Director), Ed Buyarski (President, Juneau Chapter), Mark Dyen (President, New England Chapter), Cheri Fluck (Director), Julia Haldorson (Director, Membership Secretary), Jon Kawaguchi (APS Treasurer), Marianne Kuchel (Director), Alan Lawrence (APS Vice-president), Joseph Philip (APS President), Michael Plumb (APS Secretary)

Regrets: Mary Jo Burns (Director), Maedythe Martin (Editor, President of BC Group), Diana Cormack (President, Doretta Klaber Chapter)

1. **The Minutes of August 9th, 2009** – Accepted with an amendment to item 4, Membership – “earlier” should read “later” (Michael/Linda).
2. **Treasurer’s Report** (Emailed before the meeting)
 - Total liabilities and equity as of September 30th, 2009: \$23,031.44
 - Income less expenses January 1st, 2009 to September 30th, 2009: (\$1,768.49)
 - The loss for the 3rd quarter was mainly due to the Quarterly production. Revenues will increase in the 4th quarter with membership renewals.
 - Donations are up and higher than the projected amount for 2009, but are still a vital source of funding.
 - **MOTION** (Rodney/Michael) to accept the report - carried unanimously.
3. **Committee Reports**

Seed Exchange

 - The addresses for donations and purchases have been updated in the Quarterly and on the website.
 - Jacques Mommens will continue as Seed Exchange chair, with the assistance of Mary Malloy, Judith Sellers, and others.

National Show

 - The Juneau Chapter is unable to hold the 2010 National Show. Consequently, the New England Chapter has formed a Show Committee. The President of Juneau (Ed) offered to help NE, and told the NE Show Committee to keep the \$500 they owed Juneau and use it to help run the show.
 - **ACTION:** Michael will find out if certain members in Washington State are willing to run a future show.

Editorial Committee

 - Printing costs are still relatively low, in spite of the high Canadian dollar (The Quarterly is printed in Canada at present). **ACTION:** The Editorial Committee will consult Maedythe on how the recently voted allocation of an extra \$500 should be used – whether for extra pages or extra color photos. The Editorial Report was accepted (Michael/Julia).

Membership

- As of October 25th, there were 363 APS members (346 in April, and 356 in August).
- Joe asked for two members from each chapter or group to join a committee on ways to increase membership. So far Ed and Julia volunteered from the Juneau Chapter, and Michael from the BC Group.
- Alan is working on a proposal to set up an APS Collections Program, involving both garden and wild collections. This should produce some interest in the gardening news media.
- Linda informed the board that Judy Sellers has invited the Yahoo Primula chat group to collect seed. The 287 people signed up for this chat are a potential source of new members.
- The New England Chapter is upgrading the Primrose Walk at the Berkshire Botanic Gardens, which should help gain new members.

Website

- Upgrading continues.
- **ACTION:** Anne will ask Jane to send her the Contents Page of each current Quarterly, so that this can be displayed on the website.

Technical Committee

- Report **POSTPONED**.

4. **Business Arising and Old Business**

Dorothy Dickson Award

- We need to vote on a way to select the winner in a timelier and more efficient manner. **POSTPONED** to the next meeting.

5. **New Business**

Terms of APS officers and directors

- **MOTION** (Michael/Ed): That two of the four directors elected in the coming election (winter 2009-2010) serve a term of two years instead of three. Carried. This motion was introduced to return the rotation of directors to the system laid out in the APS Constitution, by which two out of six directors are to be elected each year, in order to maintain continuity. The candidates in the upcoming election will be asked if they are willing to serve a year less than normal.
- Discussion of the other problem, in which all four officers are due for election in early 2011, was **POSTPONED** until the board meeting in fall 2010.

6. **Adjournment** (Julia/Linda) at 7:50 Eastern.

Next meeting: January 31st, 2010 (provisional)

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Plumb, Secretary



North American Rock Garden Society

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New Members this Quarter

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Kevin Baker, 11243 – 105th Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5G 2M4 Canada
Gina Docherty, 14051 Fejes Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99516 U.S.A.
Michael Dodge, 1943 Ridge Road North, Fairfield, Vermont 05455 U.S.A.
Dr. and Mrs. John Gontarz, 546 Chesterville Road, Landenberg, Pennsylvania 19350 U.S.A.
Cynthia Harvey, 7 Duston Lane, Acton, Massachusetts 01720 U.S.A.
Kathy Hirdler, 24797 Brotherhood Road, Mount Vernon, Washington 98274, U.S.A.,
Laura Howick, 10 Lincoln Street, Maynard, Massachusetts 01754, U.S.A.,
Sally Konen, Plant Native's Nursery, 8386 Daffodil Lane, Lewiston, Idaho 83501, U.S.A.,
Robin McGown, P. O. Box 54, Salisbury, Connecticut 06068, U.S.A.,
Dr. David Mellor, The Croft, Pardshaw, Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 OSP, England, U. K.,
Andy Navage, The Bloedel Reserve, 7571 NE Dolphin Drive, Bainbridge Island, Washington 98110, U.S.A.,
Patricia and Richard Poor, 7400 New Cut Road, Kingsville, Maryland 21087, U.S.A.,
Mary Seitz, 22604 Northeast 20th Place, Sammamish, Washington 98074, U.S.A.,
Vivien Self, 6 Lanchester Road, Maiden Law, Lanchester, Durham, DH7 0QS, England U.K.,
Margaret Serrao, 266 Arlington Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6C 2Z7, Canada,
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Should there ever be a question about your membership, please contact:

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P. O. Box 210913
Auke Bay, Alaska 99821 U.S.A.

membership@americanprimrosesociety.org

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The National Auricula & Primula Society - Southern Section was founded in 1876 by and for enthusiasts who raised and exhibited Auriculas, Gold-Laced polyanthus and other primulas.

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